



From the NTFP corner: Mullein

Mullein is a guest to North America; this stately herb, hailing from Eurasia, has made itself at home in disturbed areas over much of southern B.C. and the rest of the continent. As with many so-called weeds, it has values appreciated by a select few, and is even cultivated for its medicinal properties. The plant grows up to 2 m high, and has fuzzy leaves growing in a basal rosette as well as along the stem, getting smaller the higher up they go. It has a large flowering stalk of yellow, 5-petaled circular flowers. These form woolly capsules filled with many tiny seeds, each about the size of a grain of salt. Mullein is biennial, meaning that it takes 2 years to complete its life cycle.

There is no end to the creative uses for mullein! One can take advantage of the soft leaves for physical comforts (they make nice foot padding or toilet paper), or dip the flower stalks in suet and use them as torches. Cosmetically the flowers have been used as a yellow hair dye, and soap mixed with mullein ashes was said to restore natural colour to grey hair. Mullein has been described as a “powerhouse of nutrition”, due to its levels of iron, calcium, chromium, cobalt, magnesium, niacin, phosphorus, silicon, sodium, vitamin A and vitamin C. The leaves, flowers and stems of mullein can be made into tea (which is said to have a sedative effect) or used as a base for tinctures, syrups, infusions, and creams. Its medicinal products are often related to respiratory health and the treatment of colds, but research suggests that the plant also has antibacterial, antitumour, and antifungal properties. Mullein is astringent and has been used to treat hemorrhoids and diarrhea, and oil has been made from the flowers to soothe earaches or skin conditions.

It is recommended to harvest leaves before the plant goes into flower. Pick leaves off the plant, as opposed to picking the whole plant, or else sap will be drawn to the stem and reduce the leaf's active compounds. As flowers appear on the plant at different times, they can be harvested throughout the season. Roots can be harvested in the fall or early spring, but since they tend to have the same medicinal properties as the more-accessible leaves, most harvesters don't go to the trouble to harvest them. Harvesting is best done in dry weather, and some harvesters drape a cloth over their mouths to avoid inhaling the small hairs on the plant.

Leaves and flowers can be laid out on screens or hung in bundles to dry. Avoid direct sunlight or temperatures above 32°C, and ensure that there is moving air. Once fully dry they can be stored in tight-sealing containers, out of reach of direct sunlight. The leaves, stems, and flowers have hairs on them so any tea made with them will be more pleasant if they are strained.

Caution: Avoid the toxic seeds, which have been used as a narcotic in ponds to stun fish. The plant is considered safe in reasonable quantities, but the leaf fuzz may irritate skin and throat membranes. As this is a disturbance-adapted species, ensure not to harvest in areas that could be contaminated, close to roadways, or sprayed with herbicides

*The **Centre for Non-Timber Resources** at Royal Roads University does applied research and development to support the wise use of natural resources as a way to diversify and sustain rural and resource-dependent economies. We work in partnership with First Nations and other communities, industry, all levels of governments and a wide range of other organizations to better understand and to improve the*

Species: Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)

Distribution: Roadsides and disturbed areas throughout Canada

Production: Leaves: spring, flowers: summer, roots: fall or early spring

contribution of the natural products and services to livelihoods, employment- and income-generation, and sustainability. For more information please feel free to contact us (<http://cntr.royalroads.ca/>)!