

## ABSINTHE WORMWOOD

*Artemisia absinthium* L. syn *Artemisia absinthium* L. var. *insipida* Stechmann  
(Aka common wormwood, madderwort)



### Overview:

Absinthe wormwood is a perennial herb which grows from a woody base with multiple stems forming a bushy plant. The foliage has a strong aroma - similar to sage but not as pleasing.<sup>2</sup> Native to Europe and Asia, it was introduced for gardening and medicinal use in the 1800s. It has become naturalized across Canada and the northern U.S.<sup>2</sup> A volatile oil was once derived from the plant to produce the beverage absinthe liquor.

Absinthe wormwood seeds germinate throughout growing season, then overwinter as rosettes. Germination rates are high, given sufficient moisture.<sup>2</sup> It develops an extensive root and crown which stores energy to produce flowering bolts in summer from buds at crown. Prolific flowering occurs in July and are wind pollinated. Absinthe wormwood reproduces by seed only, and seeds float or are spread by animal/human traffic or dead stems tumbling in the wind. Dead stems persist through winter. Seeds remain viable 3-4 years.<sup>2</sup>

Absinthe wormwood readily infests disturbed areas; abandoned cultivation, heavy traffic areas, and damage from too early or heavy grazing.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of native *Artemisia*/wormwood species that may be confused with absinthe wormwood. The local Weed Inspector can assist in identification.

### Habitat:

Absinthe wormwood prefers ample moisture on loamy to clay-loam soils<sup>2</sup> and gravelly soils.<sup>1</sup> It prefers open exposure but can tolerate some shade.<sup>2</sup>

### Identification:

**Stems:** Are gray-green, sometime woody near the base, and generally grow 40-60 cm tall. Stems pale due to dense, fine, whitish hairs. Rosettes are mat forming.<sup>3</sup>

**Leaves:** Are gray-green, broadly ovate 3-8 x 1-4 cm, mostly pinnately lobed, and the upper surfaces bearing fine, whitish hairs. Leaves are deciduous.<sup>3</sup>

**Flowers:** Are borne in open, branched panicles generally 10-20 x 10-13 cm. Involucre are broadly ovoid and 2-3 x 3-5 mm, gray-green and silky hairy. Florets bear tiny, 1-2 mm petals. Seeds are cylindrical, hairless, shiny and about 0.5 mm.<sup>3</sup>

### Prevention:

Absinthe wormwood requires disturbance to establish. Healthy pastures and plant communities are wormwood resistant. Seeds are easily transported in hay, water and by animal/human traffic.<sup>1</sup> It can be easily controlled by competitive vegetation or herbicides.<sup>1,2</sup> Because growing buds are at top of root crown it may be killed by fire.<sup>1</sup>

### Control:

**Grazing:** Not grazed by cattle when more desirable vegetation is present.<sup>2</sup> Unpalatable to horses but grazed by sheep.<sup>1</sup> Invasive plants should never be considered as forage.

**Mechanical:** Mowing reduces but does not eliminate seed production - stems respond by growing horizontally. Late season tillage can kill new rosettes. Established plants can survive tillage with sufficient moisture.<sup>2</sup> Small patches can be hand-pulled or dug and disposed of in landfill bound garbage. Never put weeds in compost.

**Chemical:** Aminopyralid, glyphosate and dicamba are registered for use on absinth wormwood. Always check product labels to ensure the herbicide is registered for use on the target plant in Canada by the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

**Biological:** None researched to date.

### References:

<sup>1</sup> Carey, Jennifer H. 1994. *Artemisia absinthium*. In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory (Producer). Available: <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/forb/artabs/all.html> Accessed: July 5, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Maw, M. G., Thomas, A. Stahevitch, A. 1985. The biology of Canadian weeds. 66. *Artemisia absinthium* L. Can. J. Plant Sci. 65: 389-400. [www.nrcresearchpress.com](http://www.nrcresearchpress.com). Accessed: July 5, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Flora of North America. *Artemisia absinthium*. FNA Vol. 19, 20 and 21 Page 503, 519. [www.eFloras.org](http://www.eFloras.org). Accessed; July 5, 2016.

