



# BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681ext.6  
<https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

## Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl

It's the middle of winter...weed control activities are not exactly bustling, but spring will creep up faster than you may think. How many times have you asked yourself, or your friends/family/co-workers; "where did the time go, it went by so fast?!" We all have, probably many times. So, even though it's January I will give you a Weed of the Month to keep in the back of your mind and plan for come spring.

**Common Mullein (*Verbascum Thapsus*)** is a widely recognizable weed in the area. It is not a noxious weed at the state or county level, however Bonner County lists it as a roadside undesirable. A biennial in the figwort family, Common Mullein begins as a rosette of thick woolly leaves that overlap one another the first year before finishing its lifecycle the following year as a towering stem containing up to 100,000 seeds. The first year rosettes can reach diameters of 2 feet, and the second year stem can bolt to heights of 6 feet. The flowers are pale yellow and form at the top of the stem in a long spike; it stays in the flowering stage for much of the summer before going to seed. The seeds are abundant and persist in the soil for a very long time (some research suggests viability up to 100 years)—that's the bad news. The good news is the seeds are heavy and disperse no further than the footprint of the parent plant, and seed is the only mechanism of spread. Being that I incorporate a small weed biology lesson in to each of these articles, hopefully you've picked up on the fact that annuals and biennials only reproduce by seed, where perennials reproduce by both seed and vegetative parts. I may include a quiz in my next installment. :)

Common Mullein is found in just about any disturbed site; roadsides, pastures, fence rows, gardens, clear cuts and industrial areas. It's often one of the first weeds to show on a site that experienced recent soil disturbance, i.e. – fresh clear cuts, recently burned areas, recent roadside work, etc. As eluded to earlier, Bonner County includes Common Mullein as a target weed on rights-of-way—this is due to being an impediment for visibility with its tall statue and propensity to populate in thick groves. As far as issues outside of travel corridors, it can be a hindrance with gardening since it quickly germinates upon soil disturbance. It can also create a dense monoculture in forest environments post logging or burning, causing desirable vegetation [for reforestation or wildlife browse] to be outcompeted.



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Mechanical control is an effective way to combat Common Mullein. It is easy to hand pull in the spring or early summer when the soil is moist, that goes for first and second year plants. Cutting the stalk of second year plants will prevent seed dispersal—a good tactic if it's later in the summer when dry soil is making for difficult extraction. Remember, the second year plants will die on their own at the end of the growing season, so the main objective is to keep them from reaching seed maturity. Tillage is effective for controlling large infestations—a good method for first year plants. Keep in mind though, tillage will also create the disturbance Common Mullein needs for germination. And if you choose to go the route of mowing first year plants, it needs to be done regularly, as the rosettes regenerate in a hurry. Herbicide control can be a challenge since the leaves are densely covered with hairs, which makes herbicide penetration difficult. The key is to add maximum labeled rates of a quality MSO surfactant and a 2,4-D amine—the MSO helps to penetrate the fuzz and the 2,4-D acts a vehicle to translocate the specialty herbicides throughout the entire plant. Herbicides to add to the aforementioned base mix for maximum control include the following options: Opensight® (aminopyralid + metsulfuron), MSM60 (metsulfuron), Garlon®/Vastlan® (triclopyr) or VistaXRT® (fluroxypyr). The best time for herbicide control is during the first year rosette stage, but if you're looking to spray second year plants be sure to make it happen early in the season. If you want to clean an infested tract of land [where projected disturbance is minimal], use an aminopyralid product as early in the spring as possible to help knock back the seed bank. Cultural control/prevention is centered on minimizing ground disturbance in areas where Common Mullein seed banks exist, or are suspected to exist. Odds are, that's just about everywhere with as many seeds as they produce and with the length of time they stay viable. In reality, prevention for Common Mullein is only plausible in micro areas. Encourage desirable vegetation early in the year and leave the (micro) area alone—that's your shot at cultural control.

Now put this edition up for safekeeping to refer back to in a few months...carry on, January!