

# ABSINTH WORMWOOD: Options for control

**Absinth wormwood** (*Artemisia absinthium* L.), a class - C noxious weed in Lincoln County, Washington is a perennial forb which is easily recognized by its strong sage odor. Absinth wormwood is a member of the composite family. The plant also is known as American or common wormwood, mugwort or madderwort, and wormwood sage. The young flower heads are the source of aromatic oil used in preparation of vermouth and absinth. **Absinth wormwood oil is pure poison**, and should only be used externally. "Absinthium" means "without sweetness" and this is truly a bitter plant. The unpleasantly pungent fragrance and the extremely bitter taste of the foliage serve to remind that absinth is **poisonous!** Do **not** ingest any part of this toxic plant. The leaves of Absinth can be rubbed on the skin for an effective insect repellent and it's safe to do so.

Absinth wormwood is an escaped ornamental introduced from Europe. The plant causes economic losses by reducing available forage, tainting the milk of cattle that graze it, and medically as a pollen source for allergies and asthma. Grain containing

Absinth is also tainted and rejected for use in flour. Allelopathy has been demonstrated in Absinth wormwood. Volatile emissions from the leaves of absinth completely prevented germination in wheat (*Triticum tritiale*).

Absinth wormwood is a prolific seed producer but also can spread by short roots. The plant is most often found on dry soils, in overgrazed pasture and rangeland, wastelands, and roadsides. Absinth is commonly 3 feet tall at maturity but can grow over 5 feet tall. The plant is woody at the base and re-grows from the soil level each spring. Leaves are light to olive green in color, 2 to 5 inches long, and divided two or three times into deeply lobed leaflets. Leaves and stems are covered with fine silky hairs that give the plant a grayish appearance. Flower stalks appear at each upper leaf node and produce numerous flower heads 1/8 inch in diameter, which appear



from July through mid September. Many small, inconspicuous yellow flowers are produced in each head. The small seeds are scattered easily



Leaves are one to three inches long, deeply dissected, covered with fine silky hairs, that give the plant a grayish appearance.



Primarily spreads by seed production, but can also spread by its short roots.



Absinth is a prolific seed producer, one stem can produce between 674-1,468 flower heads, with 35-38 seeds per head.

from July through mid September. Many small, inconspicuous yellow flowers are produced in each head. The small seeds are scattered easily

## Key identifying traits

- Has a **strong offensive sage odor**.
- Several erect **stems** covered with fine gray hairs.
- Olive green alternate **leaves** also have silky hairs.
- **Stems** are erect and covered with fine hair.
- **Flowers** are inconspicuous, yellowish in color and arranged in spike like panicles.
- **Woody** lower stems and base, with large woody taproot.



The uninteresting dull yellow flower heads are about 1/8 in. across and droop in leafy clusters.



Absinth stems are erect, and covered with fine silky, silvery hairs.

## Biology and ecology

- Long lived **perennial**, grows 4 to 5 feet tall and 2 feet wide, from a fibrous root system.
- **Do not ingest any part of this very toxic plant.**
- Absinth **needs** very well **drained soil**, but makes few other demands.
- **Reproduces primarily through seed**, which may remain viable for 3 to 4 years.
- Exudes **allelopath**, inhibiting growth of desirable plants.
- Generally found in **dry soils** in pastures, roadsides, fence rows and waste areas.
- Tends to invade **over-grazed** or **disturbed** areas where there is little competition from other plant species.



Absinth is a semi-woody, clump forming, perennial sub-shrub, resembling sage brush.

# CONTROL MEASURES...

For this and other publications, see our website at:  
[www.co.lincoln.wa.us/weedboard/weedboard.html](http://www.co.lincoln.wa.us/weedboard/weedboard.html)

## Prevention:

- Minimizing soil disturbances from vehicles, machinery and over grazing will reduce areas where the weed might become established. **Early detection** is vital to prevent invasion.

## Biological:

- No biological agents available at this time.

## Cultural:

A good perennial grass resists infestations.

## Mechanical:

- Tillage can prevent establishment of absinth wormwood in crop production areas.
- Hand pull or dig when soil is moist, making sure to pull all the roots.
- Mowing may prevent seed production if mowed several

times throughout the growing season, but mowing may be difficult in fence rows or rocky areas.

## Chemical:

- Several herbicides are available for absinth wormwood control. Aminopyralid, clopyralid, dicamba, picloram, glyphosate, and 2,4-D have been used to control infestations. These herbicides can successfully control absinth wormwood if applied when the plant is at least 12 inches tall and in the active growing stage.
- Better residual control the following spring is achieved when herbicides are applied from late June till mid-August.
- Applying herbicides from late June until mid-August can achieve effective residual control the following spring.
- Using of a **spreader/sticker** is a **must**, due to fine hairs.
- **Read the label** instructions before applying.



Absinth (also known as artemisia or wormwood) is the main ingredient in the drink named Absinthe. Named after Artemis, the virgin goddess of the hunt and moon in the Greek mythology, twin sister of Apollo. This plant was used in ancient Egypt for healing, and is effective as an insecticide. Today's studies conclude that large consumption of absinthe can disrupt the nervous system. Due to its toxicity it was banned in several countries in the early XX century, its psychoactive ingredient 'thujone' can produce bizarre and psychotic behavior, hallucinations and delirium. When the active ingredient was controlled the ban was lifted in some countries.

You have to be on the look out when consuming the popular Absinthe for quality and precedence, as countries have different regulations in the permitted amount of thujone present in the drink. Therefore, home brews can be hazardous to your health. In the XIX century, many re-nowned artists consumed it, claiming it increased their creativity. Artist like Pablo Picasso and Van Gogh relished it so much absinthe appears in their works of art.



Absinth wormwood releases **allelopaths**, which means it exudes toxins into the soil so that no other plant species can grow around it.

Herbicide	Rate (lb/A)	Months after treatment		
		3	12	15
----- % control -----				
Dicamba (Banvel)	0.5	20	70	75
Dicamba (Banvel)	1.0	60	90	100
2,4-D	1.0	15	75	75
2,4-D	2.0	50	85	95
Picloram (Tordon 22K)	0.13	35	90	100
Picloram (Tordon 22K)	0.19	60	100	100
Picloram (Tordon 22K)	0.25	90	100	100
Clopyralid	0.19	50	90	90
Clopyralid	0.25	75	100	95
Clopyralid + 2,4-D	0.13 + 0.5	75	95	95
Clopyralid + 2,4-D	0.19 + 0.75	85	100	95
Clopyralid + 2,4-D	0.25 + 1.0	85	100	90



**WARNING**  
 The pungent, acrid fragrance and the extremely bitter taste of the foliage, serve to remind that absinth is poisonous! Do not ingest any part of this very **toxic plant**.

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 Weed Control Board  
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Photos and references courtesy of: Colorado State University; [www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/invasiveweeds/](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/invasiveweeds/); Floridata; Richard Old, XID Services, Inc., Bugwood.org; Burke Museum of History and Natural Culture.