

## MULLEIN



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### *Verbascum thapsus*

[ver-BASK-um THAP-sus]

**Family:** Scrophulariaceae

**Names:** Aaron's rod, candlewick plant, hag's taper, cow lungwort, velvet dock; flannel plant; feltwort; shepherd's staff; torches; Our Lady's Flannel; Blanket Herb; Woollen; Rag Paper; Wild Ice Leaf; Clown's Lungwort; Peter's Staff; Jacob's Staff; Shepherd's Club; Beggar's Stalk; Golden Rod; Adam's Flannel; Beggar's Blanket; Clot; Cuddy's Lungs; Duffle; Fluffweed; Hare's Beard; Old Man's Flannel; White Mullein; Mullein Dock; Dziewanna, Dziewanna Lekarska (Polish); Königskerze, Wollkraut (German); punchon, gordolobo (Mexican)

**Description:** A hardy biennial. Height up to 6 feet; width: 2-3 feet. Flowers are yellow and 1 inch across, 4 petals, clustered densely around single flower spike. There are sometimes smaller side spikes. Leaves are large ovals up to 2 feet long, thick and covered with fine, somewhat prickly hairs. They form a rosette, from which flower stalk grows. Blooms July to August beginning in 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

**Cultivation:** Grows in sunny and sheltered area in well drained chalky or poor soil. pH 5.5-7.5. Sow in spring or summer. Self-seeds in light soil. Thin or transplant to 2 feet apart. Needs to be staked in exposed sites or on rich moist soil. Not suitable for indoor cultivation.

Collect flowers as they open and leaves in their first season. Remove green parts from flowers then dry gently without artificial heat as the healing power is connected with the yellow coloring matter. Dry leaves.

**History:** The Romans called mullein *verbascum*, probably from the Latin *barba*, or "beard," and the name mullein must have originated with the Latin *mollis*, or "soft". Both describe the fuzzy leaves. *The Popular Names of British Plants* says that the it's name was derived from the Latin *malandrium* or "malady". In either case, it later became the Angle-Saxon word *molegn*. Another description of the name is that during the Middle Ages the French used the herb to treat *malandre*, an animal disease that produces boils on horses' necks. *Malandre* eventually became *malen*, and finally *mullein*. When in flower it looks like a large candle and the flower stalk dipped into tallow and lit made a primitive torch. Such candles were carried during ceremonies, especially funerals. The Romans wrapped figs in leaves to prevent them going bad. Roman women used the flowers to dye their hair lighter. Mullein was given to Ulysses

to protect him from the sorcery of Circe. Known in Greek as *Flego* and *Fluma*, that is, "to set on fire." Latin names were *Candelaria* and *Candela Regia*. Navajos called Mullein "big tobacco" and mixed it with regular tobacco to smoke to relieve coughing spasms. Known to the Pennsylvania Dutch as *Wolla Graut*. Amish permitted Mullein leaves to be smoked for the relief of asthma attacks. In Europe an extract of Mullein is used in the preparation of a liqueur called *Altvater Jaegnerdorf*. In Poland it was used in weather predictions: if the flowers were large and covered the entire stalk, the winter would be strong with much snow and vice versa. St. Hildegard swore by mullein for curing aphonia (the loss of voice caused by disease).

Germans saw mullein as a benevolent, magical spirit that could help them in times of danger and distress. One old German name "Demon Plant" (*Unholdenpflanze*) refers to these powers. People believed that mullein could banish demons and ward off harmful magic spells and diseases. When worn as an amulet, the root had to be dug up on a certain day to align its powers with those of the planets. In rural areas, some farmers still grow mullein beside their houses and outbuildings claiming that it keeps lightning away. These "weathercandles" are never brought into the house for fear tht lightning will strike.

**Constituents:** Saponins, essential oil, flavonoids (hesperidin and verbascoside), glycosides (acubin), mucilage

**Energetics:** bitter, astringent, cool

**Meridians/Organs affected:** lungs, stomach

**Properties:** anodyne, antispasmodic, demulcent, diuretic, expectorant, vulnerary, sedative, anti-catarhal, emollient, pectoral

**Medicinal Uses:** One of the primary herbs for any lung problem, including whooping cough, asthma, bronchitis and chest colds. It was traditionally smoked for lung conditions. It is also a diuretic used to relieve urinary tract

inflammation, diarrhea, and inflammation, colitis, or other bleeding in the bowel. The flowers extracted into olive oil make a preparation that is known to reduce the pain and inflammation of earache, insect bites, bruises, hemorrhoids, and sore joints. A distilled flower water or a poultice has been placed on burns, ringworm, boils and sores. The leaves are used in homeopathic products for migraine and earache.

*Combinatios:*

Bronchitis: white horehound, coltsfoot and lobelia

To use: Infuse 1-2 teaspoons of dried leaves, flowers or roots per cup of boiling water as a tea for coughs. Steep 10 minutes and strain through fine muslin to remove hairs or pollen, which can cause unpleasant itching in the mouth. Drink up to 3 cups a day. Mullein tastes bitter; add sugar, honey and lemon to improve flavor. Steep flowers in hot water until water is yellow, then drink to relieve persistent coughs, respiratory mucus and hoarseness. Or combine 2 tablespoons of mullein flowers with 1 pint of milk. Heat to the scalding point and let stand until warm. Strain and sweeten with honey. Taken at bedtime it soothes irritated bronchial passages and relieves coughing. Also helps relieve diarrhea in adults. For hemorrhoids, apply a compress made with a strong, cooled infusion. In a tincture, take 1/2 to 1 teaspoon up to three times a day. Tinctures useful for chronic respiratory disorders combined with stimulating expectorants if required. Use a gargle of flowers for throat inflammations. Infused flower oil good for earaches---First make mullein oil by placing fresh flowers in a clean glass jar and cover with just enough olive oil to submerge all the flowers. Stir the flowers to release any air bubbles and place in a warm location for about 3 days. Pour through a fine strainer. This can be used alone or in combination with garlic vinegar and glycerin (1 oz oil, 1 oz vinegar, 1 teaspoon glycerin). Put 2 drops of comfortably warm oil in each ear and gently rub the outside of the ear to work the drops in.

**Flower Essence:** Mullein essence helps the individual at those times when it must wrestle with its own conscience. It can be extremely beneficial for those who lack moral fortitude, and who may resort to dishonesty or deficient in conducting the affairs of daily life. Through Mullein the soul awakens to its inner voice and develops the capacity to listen and respond to its true Self. This remedy can be especially helpful when one must take a stand for personal authenticity, despite social pressure or confusing social mores. The essence assists the soul in achieving greater moral uprightness, infused with qualities of Light and Truth.

**Cosmetic Uses:** Flowers are used in a cream or facial steam to soften and soothe skin. Make a strong infusion to brighten fair hair.--handful of flowers in 2 pints of boiling water and allow to stand for 20 minutes before straining. Mullein water, to which a few drops of oil of rosemary have been added, is an excellent hair restorative if rubbed into the scalp daily. Ashes were once made into soap for a hair tonic. Quaker rouge was another common name. Quaker ladies, unable to use cosmetics due to their religion, would rub the downy mullein leaves on their cheeks to make them red.

**Ritual Use:** Gender: Cold; Element: Fire; Ruled by Saturn and associated with fire. Gender: cold. Used as torches in Hallow's rituals. An herb of protection, wear or hang up as an amulet to exorcise evil spirits and neutralize hexes. Sometimes used in rituals for women. Carry to keep wild animals away from you while walking in the wilderness, camping, backpacking. Wear to instill courage. Powdered leaves are known as "graveyard dust" and are acceptable to use when such is called for in old recipes. Mullein leaves were worn as charms to ensure conception and was used in love divination. A girl sought out a mullein plant and named it for her lover. She then bent the stalk toward her home and visited it from time to time to observe how it grew. If it remained bent toward her house, he was faithful; if not, he was untrue.

Mullein plays a primary role in the ancient practice of herb blessing. The period between August 15<sup>th</sup> (Mary's Ascension) and September 8<sup>th</sup> (Mary's birthday) was referred to as "the 30 days of women," long considered an auspicious time for herb gathering. This period began with the church blessing of a ritual bunch of herbs on August 15<sup>th</sup>. The number of herbs was precisely dictated, always 9, 15, 77, or 99, ritual numbers that can be traced to ancient Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations. The herbs were also prescribed. Mullein was the center of a bunch of nine. Plants groups around it were St. John's Wort, Centaury, yarrow, German Chamomile, Wormwood, Valerian, Peppermint and Arnica. The bunch was kept in the house and a pinch of it was thrown into the hearth fire whenever thunder and lightning threatened. On Epiphany, herbs were burned in a metal pan to smudge the house with its sacred smoke.

**Toxicity:** The fine hairs irritate some people's skin, producing rashes....in case one wishes to use the leaves as "natural toilet paper". Mullein seeds are toxic and may cause poisoning.

**Other uses:** Flowers make a pale yellow dye. Verbascum pollen and nectar attract bees to gardens. Leaves can be placed in shoes when soles become thin.

**Dye:** 1 pot mullein  
1/3 cup alum  
1 Tbsp cream of tartar  
4 gal water  
1 lb wool

Chop up a potful of mullein, including all parts of the plant except the root. Cover it with water and boil it for an hour. Strain out the plant material and add enough water to make up the 4 gallons. Dissolve the cream of tartar in the bath, and then the alum. Heat the wool in successively hotter rinses or warm it up in a pot on another burner. Then transfer it to the dye ooze. Hold it there for about ¾ hour. Cool and rinse until the water runs clear. All four mordants give very slight variations of the same color. Color: Yellow

**References:**

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**Resources:**

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)  
plants

Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com>  
Plants

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