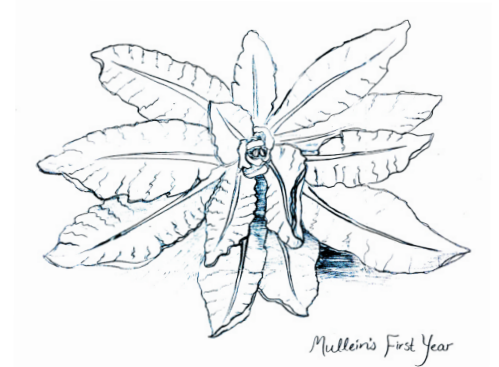




Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)



Common names:

Mullein, Aaron's rod

Verbascum thapsus is also known as Great Mullein or flannel Mullein.

Family:

Scrophulariaceae family of plants (as in Snapdragon).

Description & Habitat:

Mullein is a native of Europe and Western Asia.

In New Zealand Mullein is a naturalised weed which favours poor, stony, disturbed ground and dry soil and is often to be found growing on roadsides.

Mullein is a biennial plant, the first year growing as a rosette of downy leaves, and the second year sending up a tall spike with yellow flowers in Summer. The stem is hairy as are the leaves. Mullein grows to more than a metre in height. *Verbascum thapsus* has flowers on one main unbranched stem occurring as a large spike. Flowering is July – April.

Of the four species growing in New Zealand, *Verbascum thapsus* 'the woolly Mullein' which is especially prolific in paddocks right through the Hawkes Bay and also in the South Island and *Verbascum virgatum* 'the moth Mullein' are the most common. *Verbascum blattaria* 'the white Mullein' is mostly in Auckland though occasionally found as far south as the Wairarapa region.

Part used:

Flowers, leaf

Warnings:

There are no current warnings, precautions, or contraindications to the use of Mullein medicinally.

Active medicinal constituents:

Verbascoside, Aucubin, harpagoside, harpagide (Iridoid glycosides), Triterpenoid saponins, Mucilage, Volatile oil, Flavonoids – rutin, luteolin, hesperidin, Polysaccharides, Sterols, Resins, Bitter principle.

Nutritional content:

Vitamins A, B complex, D.

Minerals – iron, magnesium, potassium, sulphur.

Main medicinal actions:

Expectorant, Anticatarrhal, Lung tonic, demulcent, vulnerary.

Main medicinal uses:

Respiratory system – bronchitis, respiratory catarrh, colds, coughs, tuberculosis, pleurisy, whooping cough. Saponins aid expectoration and help make mucous less viscid. Antimicrobial action assists treatment of respiratory tract infection.

External use:

Earache, wounds. A poultice can be made by soaking a fresh Mullein leaf in boiled water and tying it with sticking plaster or bandage around a broken bone e.g. a toe, to help it heal.

Pharmacy:

Tincture 1:2 extract of leaf – 30-60mls per week.

Flowers are infused in oil and the oil used topically as a remedy for earache and other nerve pain.

The leaves and flowers taken as a tea relieve dry irritable coughs.

Traditional uses:

Flowers to treat wounds, haemorrhoids, throat inflammation.

Leaves warmed and applied to skin conditions.

Leaves smoked as an alternative to tobacco.

Hildegard of Bingen, of the 1100s, wrote of Mullein being a cure for a sore throat with hoarseness, with mullein and fennel in equal parts, cooked in wine.

John Parkinson (1640) recommended a decoction of the leaves with sage, marjoram and chamomile (applied externally) for cramps. He mentions that country men gave a broth of mullein to cattle that had coughs and used a poultice of the leaves for horses' hooves injured in shoeing.

Folk medicine shows that the oil can be used externally for any kind of swelling and irritation. There are many more uses including putting a mullein leaf in your shoe to relieve the pain of plantar fasciitis, and a poultice to draw out splinters and boils, for backaches, lymphatic swellings and even broken bones, soothing swollen glands and for mumps.

Verbascum thapsus was used medicinally by some Native American tribes. For example Abnaki used the roots to assist teething babies; Atsugewi used a decoction of the leaves for rheumatism and a poultice of raw leaves to treat wounds; Catawba used a poultice of leaves for pain relief of swellings and wounds and applied the poultice to sprains; Cherokee, Creek, Mohegan, and Delaware tribes used the herb to treat coughs. Iroquois, Potawatomi, and Penobscot smoked the leaves to relieve asthma.

Researched by Chris Tuffnell and Sharon Fredriksson for the Herb Federation of New Zealand for Herb Awareness Week 2010