

Invasive Plant Species in Chester, CT

Common Name: Common mugwort, Mugwort, Common wormwood

Scientific Name: *Artemisia vulgaris*

Origin: Europe and Asia

General Information: Common mugwort is an invasive perennial weed found throughout much of the World in fields, disturbed areas, forest edges and along roadsides. Used as a medicinal herb for centuries, mugwort may have been first introduced to North America in the 1500s by Jesuit missionaries. It has also arrived in ship ballast and nursery stock.

A single plant can produce up to 200,000 tiny, wind-dispersed seeds. But rapid spreading is primarily through rhizomes (horizontal underground stems) and rhizome fragments. Soil containing these fragments is a major source of new infestations. Its pollen is also wind-dispersed and can aggravate allergies, similar to its look-alike, common ragweed. Once gaining a foothold, mugwort readily forms dense single-species stands, displacing native pollinator plants.

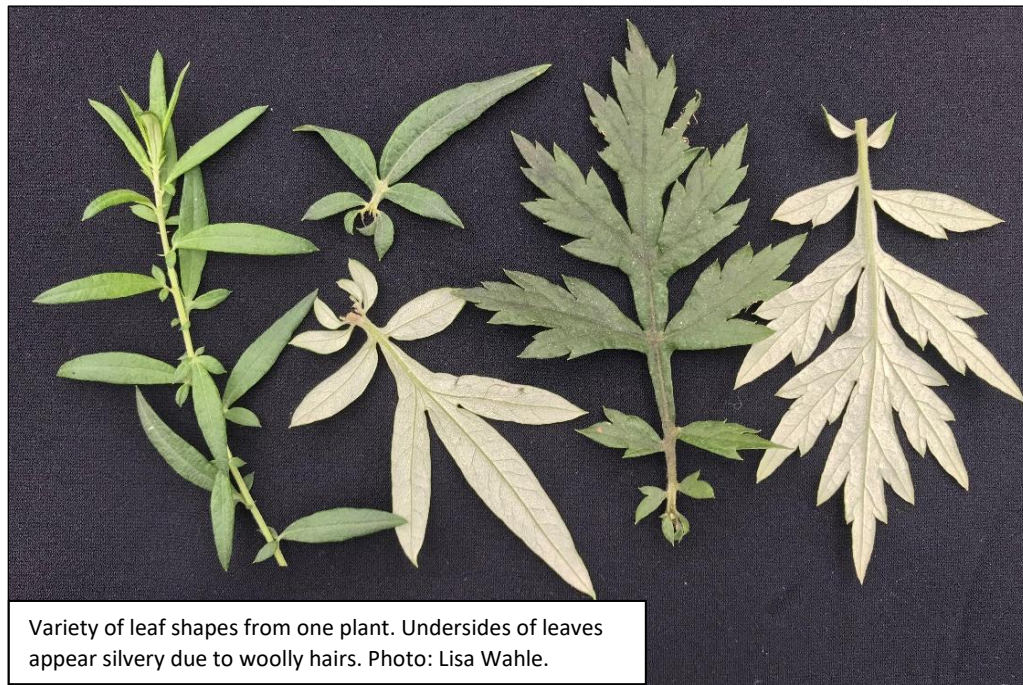
General identification and look-alikes: Common mugwort can grow from 2 to 6 feet tall. Young plants emerge in spring as a rosette of leaves, and stems persist into winter. The leaves on the spring rosette and on the lower part of mature plants resemble both chrysanthemum and common ragweed.



Mugwort infestation in Chester. Photo: Peter Auster



Mugwort in back, common ragweed in front. Photo: Peter Auster



Variety of leaf shapes from one plant. Undersides of leaves appear silvery due to woolly hairs. Photo: Lisa Wahle.

Leaves: The fragrant leaves are smooth to slightly hairy on top and covered with woolly, silver-white hairs on the underside. On the lower part of the plant they are lobed with coarse teeth. The upper leaves are lance-shaped with smooth or slightly toothed margins.



Two examples of flower heads. Photos: Ohio State University Weed Lab, Bugwood.org.

Seeds, scale in mm. Photo: Ken Chamberlain, OSU Weed Lab, Bugwood.org.

Flowers: The small flowers grow in racemes (spikes where each flower has a short stalk) or in clusters at the ends of branches. New flowers are light green and become dull yellow-green to purplish green as they mature. Flowering occurs from July through September.

Fruit: The tiny seeds (1-2 mm long) are oval or egg-shaped. They develop and mature from August to October.

Stems: Young green stems are covered with short hairs, older stems become woody and purplish

Control: To prevent mugwort establishment, always stabilize disturbed soil immediately by seeding with desired plants and mulching. Avoid bringing in foreign topsoil or fill. If this is not possible, verify that the material is free of invasive plant fragments or seeds, and monitor for two years. Respond immediately to emergence of invasive plants.

Mowing mugwort stands in summer or early fall may prevent seed formation and allow some native plants to emerge within infested patches; mowing in late fall is not advised because it can accelerate seed dispersal. Digging is labor-intensive and can possibly cause further spread with rhizome fragments. Full control generally requires multiple applications of herbicide, best started early in the growing season as soon as rosettes appear. Clopyralid and aminopyralid compounds, which do not harm grasses, have been shown to be effective.

References:

CT Invasive Plant Workgroup. <https://cipwg.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/244/2016/10/Mugwort-Poster-10-10-16-36x48Landscaperevised.pdf>.

<https://cipwg.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/244/2020/08/CT-IPC-BMPs-for-topsoil-and-mulch-FINAL-Aug-2020.pdf>

Ohio State University Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide. <https://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide/>.