

Around Dakota Ag

Absinth wormwood spreads through ND

STATE weed control officials say that the noxious weed absinth wormwood appears to be spreading in parts of North Dakota.

"Weed officers and producers are telling us that they are seeing more and larger infestations of absinth wormwood, especially in western North Dakota," says Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring. "There have also been reports of this plant being sold at some retail locations in the state."

Goehring urges producers to report wormwood infestations to local county or city weed officers; he also asks retail and wholesale garden suppliers to stop selling the plant.

A perennial, flowering plant with a strong sage odor, absinth wormwood is covered with small, inconspicuous hairs that give it a grayish appearance. It usually grows to about 3 feet in height, but can be as tall as 5 feet. Its leaves are light green to olive, 2 to 5 inches long and divided into two or three deeply lobed leaflets. Small, inconspicuous

Key Points

- North Dakota officials alarmed about absinth wormwood.
- The toxic weed is spreading rapidly in western North Dakota.
- Ag commissioners ask retailers to stop selling the weed.

uous yellow flowers appear in July and August.

Each plant produces several thousand seeds and can also reproduce by its roots.

It rapidly infests pasture and rangeland, as well as disturbed sites and roadsides, reducing available forage. It is also found in cities, especially in abandoned lots that are not regularly mowed. Absinth wormwood taints the milk of cows that eat the plant.

554,175 acres infested

North Dakota reported 554,175 acres infested with absinth wormwood in 2008.

It's readily controlled by a variety of herbicides, including picloram, dicamba, clopyralid, aminopyralid, glyphosate and

2,4-D. If herbicide application is difficult, mowing plants before seed set is recommended. Research is now under way to find biological control agents.

Also known as American wormwood, common wormwood, mugwort, madderwort and wormwood sage, absinth wormwood was first brought to this country in the early 19th century from Europe where it is cultivated for medicinal purposes, as an ornamental plant and as a flavoring. It is an ingredient and gives its name to the once-notorious alcoholic beverage absinthe, which until recently was banned in this country because of its supposed narcotic properties.

Absinth wormwood has been on North Dakota's noxious weed list since at least 1971. State law requires landowners to control the spread of noxious weeds on their property. Producers should contact their local weed board for cost-share assistance.

Source: North Dakota Department of Agriculture



PHOTO: USDA

WEED WATCH: Absinth wormwood's spread and sale by some retailers alarms North Dakota Department of Agriculture noxious weed specialists.

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