

# **Mediterranean sage**

*Salvia aethiopsis*

Mediterranean sage is a 'Class A' weed in the State of Washington. A 'Class A' weed is defined as a non-native species whose distribution in Washington is still limited. Preventing new infestations and eradicating existing infestations are the highest priority. Eradication of all 'Class A' plants is required by law. Mediterranean sage is on the noxious weed lists for CA, CO, NV, OR, and WA.

Mediterranean sage is described as an aromatic biennial that may act as a short-lived perennial or even an annual. A mature plant can reach 3 feet in height. Med sage is a member of the mint family and is an extremely handsome plant when it is in full bloom and covered with delicate white flowers. When the leaves are crushed a sage-like or medicinal-type odor is emitted. The overall plant is covered with dense, woolly hairs, especially when young. During the first year of growth, Mediterranean sage is a basal rosette of grayish green leaves. The second year rosette is leafier, and the leaves are somewhat fleshy, with an almost felt-like appearance due to the hairs.

The flowering stems bolt as a single, square-like stalk, and develop into a much-branched inflorescence (the arrangement of flowers on the plant), with many small white flowers. The whole inflorescence resembles a candelabra. Each flower produces four smooth, egg-shaped seeds. Each plant may produce 50-100,000 seeds.

The rosettes of common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), may be confused with mediterranean sage rosettes. Three key characteristics are: mullein leaves are not stalked, the margins are entire, and when the mullein leaves are crushed, they do not smell like sage.

The biology of this plant is well adapted to facilitate the spread in many western states – high seed production, the ability for summer dormancy to avoid drought, the tumbling dispersal of seeds, and the ability to adapt to a wide range of habitat and environmental conditions in rangeland. Mediterranean sage is primarily a rangeland weed, although it does occur in alfalfa and grain crops. It is not palatable, and this lack of grazing by livestock helps with the spread and establishment in pastures and rangelands. The rate of spread of Mediterranean sage in Oregon went from 42,000 acres to over 100,000 acres in 6 years. By 1995 they estimated that 1,300,000 acres were infested. California, Idaho, and Colorado have established populations. There are three counties in Washington that have reported infestation sites.

Mediterranean sage was introduced to the United States both as a garden ornamental and as a contaminant in alfalfa seed. It is spread longer distances by livestock, wildlife (including birds), roadside vehicles, contaminated gravel, and as a contaminant in agricultural crops (hay).

We have two separate and distinct sites in Asotin County. The Asotin Weed Board works closely with the land owners and managers to control and contain these plants. Our goal is to eradicate both of these populations.

