

beard



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



Moth Mullein

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Hot diggety! It's Moth Mullein time!

There's so much to say, so let's dig right in, starting with its pronunciation. Without being mulish, I pictured the “mullein” being pronounced like Moline, Illinois. How wrong! It's accented on the first syllable and sounds as if I were mulling what to say next. Which I rather will be since the page with so many good notes (the reason for my “hot diggety!”) has mysteriously disappeared.



“Just one – ever!” I noted in July of 1999: “north lawn.” Since, I've found more at water's edge (with what appears in my picture to be the golden back of a dog in the water just beyond). Growing on a spike with scant leaves, it's shown any time under yellow flowers, though they can be white as well – as are mine. The buds are “button-like” with orange anthers and purplish beards on the stamens (Peterson's Wildflowers). The leaves form a basil rosette around the stem. The flowers are truly beautiful, not too hard to see since the plant can grow to three feet. Found like many wildflowers along roadsides and in waste places and vacant lots, they've spread all the way from Florida to Quebec. Like the other mulleins, all are members of the snapdragon family.

The National Audubon Society shows it with both yellow and white flowers. There's no reason but I do prefer the white. They also mention a White Mullein with “yellow (rarely white) flowers.” Go figure. Ours are just an inch wide.

If you've been following my wildflower articles you'll know most (all?) were brought from Europe to naturalize here. “Its fuzzy filament resembles moth antennae, hence the common name.” I wonder who thought that one up!

Newcomb is the only one of my three who also pictures the leaves. I'm relieved for they are so ugly (can I say that? Well, they are compared to the delicate flowers and the web talks of “attractive flowers and unattractive foliage” so I



guess I can), I began to wonder if my pictures were in error. Though the leaves can be smooth, toothed or lobed, the big ones near the plant's base are huge, wavy and look like what I imagine an alligator's tongue might resemble. (Hey! I have no clue.) But, yes, with huge leaves (further down) clasping the stem. Newcomb places these in the Figwort Family with which obviously Peterson must disagree. Wikipedia sides with Newcomb on this.

Native to Eurasia and Northern Africa, naturalized in the US and much of Canada, moth mullein has become an invasive species there. Colorado goes so far as to name it a 'noxious weed.'"

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I think Colorado ought to think again for, besides being attractive, it offers many health benefits. Let's start with those fancy big leaves: steep them to make a cough syrup or hot tea, terrific for a cold or the flu, any respiratory infections. To run quickly down the long list: solve sleep disorders, improve digestion, skincare benefits, relief from muscle and joint pain, treat allergies, treat ear infections, treat asthma, relieve migraines, stop inflammation, treat gout, relieve constipation and it's also deemed safe for animals. (The oil is also a powerful disinfectant that can be used on many infections.)

This lovely plant can be used to relieve ear aches and infections because of its strong anti-inflammatory effect. It can also increase lymph flow making it particularly good for bruises and skin infections. It might also relieve a goiter and is said to help breathing while the leaves can help with lung congestion and mucus production. Commercial preparations are available while, in older times, people actually smoked the leaves. Those same leaves are lubricating so can help with painful aches and joints, even mild back aches. Studies have also shown it can strengthen bladder muscles. Add it can soothe the skin, cold sores and hemorrhoids.

Goodness! One can get lost following all these websites. Why spend time on a lovely summer day staring at a computer screen?

If any of you are taking these comments as truth, I'd advise you to be careful. Do more research or trust those you know. Or allow me to offer my own prescription:

It's about time for Moth Mullein to begin flowering for the summer. Go look and enjoy the fresh air.

That's much more sensible than following all these crazy suggestions.

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