

Velvetleaf

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Velvetleaf *Abutilon theophrasti* Medik.

Also known as: wild cotton, buttonweed, Indian mallow, butterprint, piemarker

Classification and Description:

Velvetleaf is a member of the Malvaceae, or mallow, family. It is native to Asia and was introduced to America from India. Velvetleaf is an erect, annual weed that can grow to heights of 7 feet. The hypocotyls of seedling velvetleaf are covered with fine hairs. One cotyledon is rounded and the other heart-shaped with smooth margins, and both are covered with hairs. The first true leaves are alternate, ovate to heart-shaped, hairy and have toothed margins. Later leaves are large, 2-7 inches long and up to 8 inches wide, have velvety hairs on both surfaces and long petioles. Leaves are heart-shaped, have toothed margins and are pointed at the tip. Stems are erect, sparingly branched and covered in short hairs. Stems of larger plants are thick and tough. Stems give off a strong odor when chopped. Flowers occur singly, can be up to 1 inch wide, have five petals, and are orange-yellow to yellow.

They are on short stalks in the upper part of the plant where the leaf meets the stem. The fruit is a capsule up to 1 inch wide that has a ring of beaks or prickles around the upper edge. Seed is rounded to triangular, flat, dull grayish-brown with a notch. With a little imagination, a velvetleaf seed resembles a catcher's mitt. Reproduction is by seed. Velvetleaf has a taproot and fibrous root system.

Weed Status and Injury:

Velvetleaf (most commonly called wild cotton in Tennessee) can be found in agronomic crops, pastures, waste areas, roadsides and fence rows in Tennessee. Velvetleaf can be a very competitive plant and is well-documented in reducing yields of cotton, corn and soybean.

Interesting Facts:

Velvetleaf originated in either China or India. Its use as a fiber crop in China dates to 2000 B.C. or earlier. It is still grown there for fiber, which is used to make ropes, coarse cloth, nets, paper and



Large velvetleaf



Cotyledon velvetleaf

caulk for boats. Whether as foreign material in crop seed or as an intended fiber crop, velvetleaf arrived in North America probably before 1700, and became widespread along the East Coast by the early 1700s. Because the colonies desperately needed fiber for rope and cloth, velvetleaf was widely cultivated in the mid-1700s. Although attempts to process velvetleaf fiber never succeeded economically, U. S. farmers continued to cultivate it for more than 100 years.

Velvetleaf belongs to the same plant family as cotton. It is a wild host to both cotton bollworm (*Helioverpa zea*) and budworm (*Heliothis virescens*). Seedling velvetleaf is commonly mistaken for seedling prickly sida, also called teaweed (*Sida spinosa*), which has two heart-shaped cotyledons and has a first true leaf that is more serrated than vel-



Teaweed (left), velvetleaf (right)

vetleaf. The cotyledons of velvetleaf appear to be thicker when compared to prickly sida. Seedling velvetleaf is also mistaken for spurred anoda (*Anoda cristata*) as it too has one rounded and one heart-shaped cotyledon. However, the first true leaves of spurred anoda are more triangular shaped and later leaves are coarsely toothed and have three distinct lobes. Velvetleaf is a more common pest in the northern counties of Tennessee, while spurred anoda is more typically found in the southern counties of the state. Velvetleaf can cause an allergic skin reaction in some people. Seeds are eaten by mourning doves and quail. Please refer to the *Weed Control Manual for Tennessee Row Crops* (Extension PB 1580) for specific herbicides and management recommendations within various crops.

References:

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