

Ragwort

Jacobaea vulgaris

What does it look like?

Ragwort (also known as *Senecio jacobaea*) is a member of the daisy family. It is an erect, annual to perennial herb and usually grows to 45-70cm tall, but can reach 1.6m high. It has reddish-purple stems and wrinkled, divided leaves, which are dark green on top with a downy lining. Leaves appear in a rosette that grows into a dense cluster. Its flowers are bright yellow, and appear in clusters. Downy (fluffy), parachute-like seeds are present.

Ragwort prefers areas of open space with some area of bare ground for seeds to germinate in, particularly in high rainfall areas. It will invade open forests, riverbeds, swamps, pastures and coastal areas. It also tolerates a wide range of environmental conditions, except for shade. Especially abundant in areas of higher rainfall.



Why is it a problem?

An aggressive, prolific flowering plant that colonises exposed areas, i.e. paddocks. Matures quickly, may reduce the productivity of the land, also may out-compete native plant seedlings.

The plant is toxic to grazing animals, directly affecting the liver by increasing its ability to accumulate copper. However, animal deaths from ragwort poisoning are not common, as cattle, deer and horses selectively avoid grazing it. Sheep will eat ragwort without any apparent adverse effects, unless they are continuously exposed to it in large quantities, or if they are not used to feeding on it.



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Control Methods

Herbicide control

Spray rosette plants (winter-spring only, before stem formed): 2,4-D (50ml/10 litres (knapsack) or 1-3 litres/ha in 300 litres water (boom spraying)). Or,

Spray: cut any seedheads and dispose of by burning or deep burial, apply glyphosate (100ml/10L knapsack) or metsulfuron-methyl 600 g/kg (5g/10L knapsack) ensuring entire plant is covered.

Damaged plants (from cutting, digging, pugging, mowing or poor spraying) usually regrow, form large additional root crowns (multicrown) and become perennial, ie. flowering annually and not dying. These plants do not respond to 2,4-D herbicide, requiring tougher, more residual herbicides.

Ragwort can be left in regenerating bush and shrubland as will disappear as light levels fall.

CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

Biological control

The ragwort flea beetle was released in the Wellington region in 1988, followed by the cinnabar moth in 2006 and the ragwort plume moth in 2012. The cinnabar moth and flea beetle are both widespread in the region. Contact GW for more information.

Related Links

New Zealand Plant Conservation Network http://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora_details.aspx?ID=2748

NZ Flora <http://www.nzflora.info/factsheet/Taxon/Jacobaea-vulgaris.html>

Weedbusters <https://www.weedbusters.org.nz/what-are-weeds/weed-list/ragwort/>