

Managing Common Ragwort

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This classified weed is extremely poisonous to cattle, deer, pigs, horses and goats.



What is it?

Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) is native to Europe, Asia and Siberia and in the UK specified as a weed. It is usually a biennial, after flowering in the second year it dies, but it is capable of becoming a perennial through environmental stress or interference by competitors, herbivores or control tactics. The plant is erect & robust reaching a height of up to 6 ft tall and develops a stout main root up to 1 ft deep. Each plant can produce up to 150,000 seeds with a 70% germination rate and the seeds can be dormant in the soil for up to 20 years. Ragwort has few requirements and will grow on even the poorest land.

What is the problem?

For human activity:

- There is mounting evidence to suggest that it is poisonous to humans.
- The poison is almost certainly absorbed through skin.

For existing habitats:

- Plant contains alkaloids, which are poisonous to cattle, deer, pigs and goats.
- Symptoms are not evident until the damage to liver is irreversible & leads to death.
- Still poisonous when dried & more likely to be eaten, as it becomes more palatable & easily incorporated in hay.
- Cumulative in affect so that eating a small amount regularly is the same as a single large amount.
- 2lb is enough to destroy 75% of the liver of a large animal like a horse.

What does the law say?

- Ragwort is specified in the Weeds Act 1959. This gives DEFRA (*Department for the Environment Food & Rural Affairs*) the power to serve notice upon the occupier of any land on which ragwort is growing, requiring them to take action within a specified time to prevent the weed from spreading on to agricultural land.
- The Environmental Protection Act 1990 - places a duty of care on all waste producers and Ragwort is identified as a controlled waste. This means it has to be dealt with within your legislative requirement for waste management.



How do you deal with it?

- Firstly identify the plant as Common Ragwort (see page 2).
- All infestations should be reported to DEFRA or the Scottish Office Agriculture & Fisheries Department or the Welsh Office Agriculture Department as applicable.
- Also, on verges report to your local authority and on motorways & trunk roads the relevant Highway Agency. Sightings on railways should be reported to Railtrack.
- For guidance in this contact your site Environmental Co-ordinator.

Contacts:

- DEFRA web site at: www.defra.gov.uk (local number in your phone book)
- Local Authority & Highways Agency check your phone book for the local number.
- Railtrack Tel: 0345 114141
- Environment Agency web site at www.environment-agency.gov.uk Tel: 08459 333 111

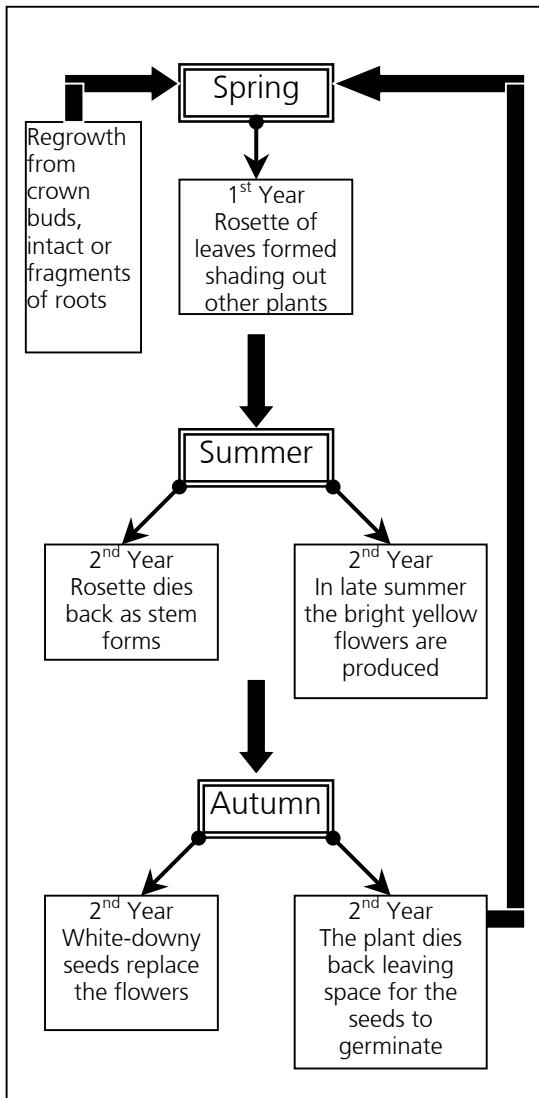
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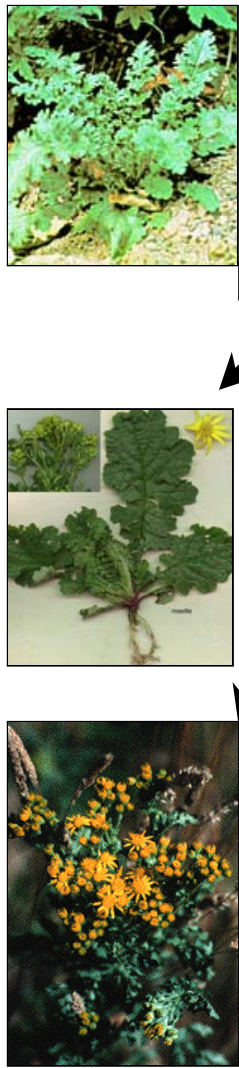
Common Ragwort Identification

Life Cycle



Checklist

	Features	Yes	No
ROOTS	Up to 1ft deep.		
	Stout taproot with numerous fleshy roots		
	Plant regenerates from roots if not removed		
STEM	Maximum height ranges from 1.3 - 6 ft		
	Woody & tough		
	Slightly red near base but green & branching near the top		
LEAVES	Dark green & deeply lobed		
	Lower leaves form a rosette which dies back when flowering is advanced		
	Irregular & jagged		
FLOWERS	Bright yellow flowers		
	Daisy-like		
	Densely packed in flat topped clusters		
SEEDS	Produces large quantities of seeds, 150,000		
	White-downy seeds		
GENERAL	Highly toxic & causes poisoning		



*If **YES** is greater than **NO** – Treat as Common Ragwort or get a 2nd opinion from your site co-ordinator.*

Common Ragwort – Do's & Don'ts

- Do's**
- Try to identify Common Ragwort as soon as possible.
 - Act responsibly in preventing its spread.
 - Wear gloves if handling plant.
 - Call your environmental co-ordinator and report the Ragwort early.

- Don'ts**
- Waste time as control may take time to devise & implement.
 - Chip or flail as fragments of material can easily regrow.
 - Dump soil that may contain seeds or any plant material.
 - Leave burnt ragwort on the site, as this is still poisonous.