

Tansy Ragwort

(*Senecio jacobaea*)

Prevention & Management



Recognition

Tansy Ragwort is easily recognized by its bright yellow flower heads, with each flower bearing about 13 petals (ray florets), and by its soft, deeply lobed leaves. In the spring, first year tansy forms a rosette with dark green ruffled leaves on purplish stems. In midsummer, second year rosettes bolt up to six feet tall and begin to bud. After setting seed, the plant usually dies. If, however, flowering is interrupted it becomes a short-lived, multi-stemmed perennial. Tansy ragwort spreads by seed which can remain viable up to 15 years.

Why control tansy ragwort?

Tansy is toxic to livestock and can be fatal to horses and cattle. Damage to the liver is cumulative and irreversible. Poisoning usually occurs when tansy is mixed with hay, since dried and wilted plants lose their characteristic odor and bitter taste, or in the spring, when it is difficult for animals to selectively avoid young rosettes. When the toxins contaminate milk or honey they become unpalatable.

Tansy Ragwort Control

By law, all herbicides must be used in strict accordance with label instructions.

Tools for tansy ragwort

- Protective clothing, including gloves, and face mask if allergic to the tansy alkaloids.
- Clippers
- Trowel
- Plastic bag
- Propane torch for winter rosettes if appropriate
- Herbicide if appropriate

Mechanical Control

Seedlings and rosettes: Dig up isolated or small infestations with a trowel. Root fragments left behind can regrow. During the wet season, small rosettes can be singed with a propane torch, being careful not to damage adjacent vegetation.

Bolting plants: Pull plants after they bolt, but before they flower. Some regrowth from mature roots may occur. If plants are in flower, remove and bag all flower and seed heads.

Mowing: While mowing does not control tansy, it can be used as an interim measure. However, mowed plants will reflower closer to the ground, increasing the likelihood of poisoning grazing animals. Be sure to clean your mower before moving to the next project.

What to do with the remains:

Remove plants from pastures being used by livestock or for hay. Otherwise, after bagging flower and seed heads, leave the remains behind to decompose. Bagged flowers and seed heads can be taken to the nearest solid waste facility at no charge. Do not burn plant residue.

Biological Control

Introduced biological control insects have undergone a rigorous testing period to ascertain that they will only feed on the intended host. Three species of introduced insects are currently helping to control tansy ragwort:

- Flea beetles (*Longitarsus jacobaeae*): Larvae actively feed on the roots of the tansy during the winter and spring, but are dormant during the dry season. Look for rosette leaves with profuse small holes in the leaf blades in the fall and winter. If you have a strong population of flea beetles, wait until the plants bolt in July and then cut and bag the flowering stalks.



- Seed head flies (*Botanophila seneciella*): The larvae actively feed on the developing seeds, thus reducing the reproductive potential of the plants. Look for frothy or hardened spittle encasing the central florets in mid to late summer.



- Cinnabar moth caterpillars (*Tyria jacobaeae*): The caterpillars are capable of stripping the foliage and flowers down to bare stalks. However, the plant often reblooms after the caterpillars have left the plant to pupate. These moths were introduced before rigorous testing was required and their redistribution is no longer encouraged since they occasionally feed on other native and non-native *Senecio* and *Packera* species. Look for numerous black and yellow striped caterpillars crawling on plants.



Chemical Control

A selective broad leaf herbicide may be more practical in controlling large infestations rather than large scale pulling or digging. For specific herbicide information, contact the SJC Noxious Weed Program.

Look-Alikes

Tansy ragwort looks similar to its close relatives, woodland groundsel, which has narrow lobed leaves and reduced ray florets, and dusty miller with which it may hybridize. It also resembles, from a distance, another common roadside noxious weed, St John's wort.

If you would like weed identification, site specific control recommendations or additional noxious weed information, contact:

[San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Department](#)

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