

Yellow Ragwort

Senecio jacobaea

**Boundary Control Plant under the
West Coast Regional Pest Plant
Management Strategy**



Where has Yellow Ragwort come from?

Yellow Ragwort, *Senecio jacobaea*, was introduced into New Zealand as a garden plant in 1870. However it has long since "jumped the fence" to become a major weed of pasture and wasteland over most of New Zealand, including the West Coast. The related Pink Ragwort, *Senecio glastifolius*, has similar potential for invasiveness and is already recognised as a pest plant in many parts of the North Island.

What does Yellow Ragwort look like?

Yellow Ragwort is an erect biennial or perennial herb which reproduces from crowns, roots or seeds. The leaves are dark green and deeply incised into irregular segment giving the plant a raggedy appearance. By early winter the characteristic leafy ragwort "rosette" has developed standing 2-5 cm high and up to 15cm in diameter. This becomes a "cabbage rosette" by late winter. In spring reddish – purple stems begin to grow, reaching up to 60cm high before branching. Between November and January a bright yellow daisy like flower will bloom from each branch, before the plant goes to seed. If these blooms are allowed to seed, one plant can produce up to 250,000 seeds which can remain dormant in the soil up to 16 years.

Why is Yellow Ragwort a Pest Plant?

Yellow Ragwort is a pest plant because it can have a marked effect on farm productivity particularly dairy farms, if left to grow unchecked. It is toxic to grazing animals, causing liver damage. Cattle will avoid grazing ragwort if other pasture is available but sheep will keep moderate amounts of ragwort in check without ill-effect.

Yellow Ragwort seeds prolifically, and can reproduce from both crowns and roots as well, making it almost impossible to get rid of once present. Control costs can escalate rapidly if control measures are not undertaken routinely. Repeated re-infestations of controlled pasture land by wind or water borne seed from ragwort growing along riparian areas and transport corridors is also a problem in many areas.

What is the Boundary Control Rule for Yellow Ragwort?

On the West Coast region, a boundary control rule only applies for Yellow Ragwort as the plant is too widespread for total control (eradication). The rule states that:

"Land occupiers must destroy any Yellow Ragwort plants within 50m of the boundary when the adjoining land is clear of Yellow Ragwort in excess of 100m of that boundary, or is effectively clear of Yellow Ragwort."



Top right: Yellow Ragwort plant in flower
Above: Yellow Ragwort crown [Massey Uni]

What are the best methods of control?

A mixed method approach is advised for Yellow Ragwort control but overall the methods chosen will depend on infestation levels. Mowing is not recommended as it causes growth of multi-crowned perennial plants. Care with timing will be needed if spraying is planned near any biocontrol releases (*see more below*).

Manual Methods

Grubbing or handpulling ragwort is labour intensive but effective if done at the optimum time which is when the plant is in full flower, but not seeding. At this stage the roots usually don't regrow. Because pulled plants still have the capacity to set seed, pulled plants should be disposed of responsibly, i.e. dry and burn the flower heads OR put in black plastic bags and send to a lined landfill.

Herbicide Methods

A choice between spot, boom or aerial spraying methods may be made depending on the level of infestation. Boom and aerial spraying are usually carried out over the autumn – winter months but it is possible to successfully spot spray until the flowers appear. After that it is more difficult to kill plants which are in full flower or going to seed. Potential for wind drift should be considered by those planning a boom or aerial spraying programme.

For low infestations of ragwort where other pasture cover is a consideration, spot spraying with a herbicide such as Tordon* Gold or the use of granules such as Tordon 2G are good options.

For moderate to large infestations where it is necessary to use boom or aerial spraying, the best time is when other pasture growth is slow, i.e. in early winter. Some herbicide options here are Pasture-Kleen, Escort, Relay or, Roundup Renew Extra or check with your nearest rural supplier or Regional Council for further information.

For personal safety please use all herbicides as per manufacturer's labelling

Biocontrols

The plume moth, *Platyptilia isodactyla*, is available to West Coast land occupiers with ragwort problems. For more information about this biocontrol and/or the availability of a moth release, contact Caryl Coates of the West Coast Ragwort Control Trust on 03 731 1805

Where can I get more help?

For further information call either of the Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinators. They are:

Mary Traves: Environmental Information Officer, West Coast Regional Council (768 0466 or 0508 800 118)

Tom Belton: Technical Support Officer Biosecurity & Weeds, Department of Conservation, West Coast - Tai Poutini Conservancy, Hokitika (03 756 9100)



www.weedbusters.org.nz

The West Coast Regional Council does not accept liability for any advice given on this sheet regarding application of herbicides for pest plant control. The brand names listed imply neither endorsement of those brands, nor criticism of any other brands not listed.