

# weed warning

## Don't let them get away!

Invasive weeds are most effectively controlled when they and their numbers are small – a little weed control work today will save many dollars and days of work in years to come. Now is the time to take action!

## Control that weed!

Control methods for ragwort may include a combination of selective grazing regimes, mechanical control, cultivation, the selective application of herbicides, biological control and ongoing monitoring.

**Hand-pulling** or **digging out** can be effective in smaller populations, but care must be taken to ensure that the bulk of the large roots are removed to prevent them from resprouting.

In infested pasture, **pasture improvement** and/or **grazing management** (using sheep) should be considered essential to any integrated control program if it is to be successful in the long term. In some situations, turning over the pasture to cropping for some time can exhaust soil borne seed reserves and destroy established plants; on other sites, the establishment of trees might be considered to shade out ragwort in the long term. All of these techniques will need to be implemented along with other methods.

**Chemical control** can be a very effective part of an integrated weed management control plan – there are a number of different herbicides registered for use within Tasmania which have proven to be effective on ragwort - consult the DPIW Ragwort Service Sheet for more details.

A number of successful **biological control agents** have also established on ragwort in Tasmania. Contact the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research on 1300 368 550.

The best solution for your site will vary with the type and intensity of infestation – for advice and more details on control methods, consult the DPIPWE website ([www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/weeds](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/weeds))

## Do the right thing

Weed waste dumped in bushland or local reserves gives pest plants a leg-up into new areas. Do the right thing, and dispose of your weed waste responsibly.

Double-bag any flowering or seeding ragwort you have removed, and burn on-site in an enclosed incinerator (to prevent seeds escaping).

Weeds are easily spread by contaminated machinery, stock and people – check your clothes, shoes and vehicles for soil or plant matter that could be carrying weedy plant seeds.

**Do not** leave ragwort plants that you have pulled on the road or roadside – the seeds will be spread by passing vehicles.

## Get informed

Ragwort is a significant weed threat for Southern Tasmania. If you believe you have discovered a new population of this weed, contact your local Council office or call the DPIPWE on 1300 368 550



## Impacts

Reduces pasture productivity, contaminates hay and silage, poisons stock, reduces milk, meat and wool production and can cause death to cattle and horses

## Current distribution in Southern Tasmania

**Widespread:** throughout Huon Valley and Kingborough

**Localised and/or isolated:** in the Derwent Valley, Tasman and Central Highlands



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## Background

Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), a native of Europe and western Asia, is thought to have been introduced to Australia accidentally with animals or pasture early during European settlement. It has long been recognised as a weed, being mentioned in Victoria's *Thistle Act 1890*.

Today, ragwort is a widespread weed of agriculture, found across Australia's southern States, but causing most problems in the higher rainfall areas of Victoria and Tasmania. It readily invades poorly managed pasture, degraded and disturbed areas, swiftly establishing and growing to out-compete other species. One plant may produce up to 250,000 seeds each year, which are readily dispersed by wind, water, on dirty machinery and clothing, by animals or in contaminated hay or soil.

Ragwort is highly toxic to cattle and horses, but less so to sheep, which is why it is infrequently seen on sheep grazing country. Cattle and horses will generally avoid eating ragwort, but when food is scarce, will eat the plants and may suffer liver damage which in extreme cases leads to death. More dangerous is the consumption by livestock of ragwort in silage, or dried in hay. In these products, stock are less likely to notice the toxic weed, and are more likely to consume fatal quantities of it. Smaller doses of ragwort may lead to losses in milk, meat or wool production.

It is estimated that ragwort costs Tasmania \$3 million annually in lost productivity and control costs. Control programs in many parts of the State have significantly reduced many localised populations of this weed, however, there is still much to be done to reduce this toxic plant's impact on Tasmania's agricultural systems.

## Get a positive ID

Ragwort if left undisturbed will in the first year form a leafy rosette, and then in the second year flower and die. This is referred to as a 'biennial' (two year) lifecycle. Depending on conditions and levels of disturbance, ragwort can also become a perennial plant. In response to physical damage by grazing, slashing etc, ragwort can resprout from underground root crowns.

Seedlings of ragwort generally germinate after the first heavy autumn rains, although they may continue to pop up until spring. The seedlings form rosettes of leaves 5-35cm long – these leaves have stalks (which are often purplish towards their base) and irregular, deeply lobed edges (see photo inset).

Rosettes develop upright flowering stems from late spring onwards, the lower rosette leaves dying off as the stalk develops. Bright yellow flowers are borne in bunches at the top of the flowering stalk, generally appearing from summer to autumn. The flowers are daisy-like in appearance, and are approximately 15-25mm across. They produce two different types of seeds – one type is smooth and heavy, and falls directly to the ground upon maturity. The other variety has a bristly external coat, which allows it to catch on animals or clothing, as well as a *pappus* – the white feathery 'parachutes' that allow seeds to be carried away by the wind. This seed type can move much further from the parent plant, and invade new areas.

When mature, ragwort is an upright herb generally between 45-80cm tall, although it has been known to reach heights of up to 180cm.



There are many native species of *Senecio* which may be considered to resemble ragwort. Unlike most commonly observed native *Senecios*, ragwort has very deeply lobed leaves (see photo). If you are uncertain whether or not a plant you have found is ragwort, collect a sample of it in a sealed bag, and contact your local Council office or a DPIPWE representative.

## Weed management – it's your responsibility

Many people unwittingly harbour pest plants in their gardens – some even actively grow them, knowing nothing of their weedy ways.

Ragwort is a declared weed under Tasmania's *Weed Management Act 1999*. It is your responsibility to control ragwort on your land. Failure to remove it from your property could result in legal action. It is also illegal to distribute the plant or its seed in any way, whether as cut flowers, in contaminated feed, on livestock or on dirty equipment.

### Weeds are a growing problem.

**Act now – make a plan and make a start!**

### Images:

1. A young ragwort rosette showing deeply lobed leaves
2. Ragwort's daisy-like flower
3. Ragwort seeds