

# TANSY RAGWORT

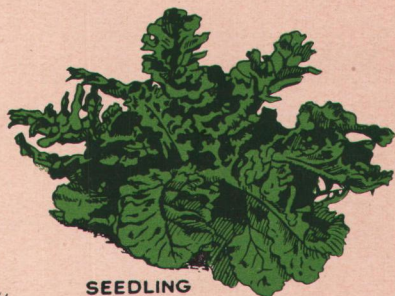
*... a Poisonous Weed*

Rex Warren

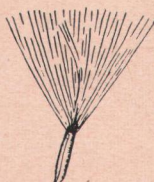
Virgil Freed



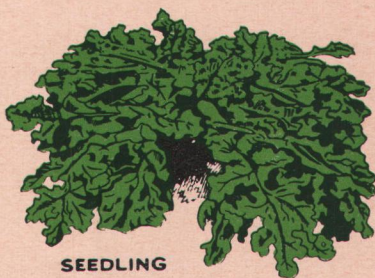
MATURE PLANT



SEEDLING



SEED



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# TANSY RAGWORT

## ... a Poisonous Weed

REX WARREN and VIRGIL FREED\*

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Stinking willie, Staggerwort, Common ragwort.

Tansy ragwort, *Senecio jacobaea*, is one of western Oregon's most serious problems. It was first found in the coastal counties but has spread in a few years over most of the Willamette Valley and southern Oregon. Tansy ragwort is a perennial weed. Most of the plants, however, live only two years under natural growing conditions. Plants which are cut or broken during the second year's growth oftentimes live for a third year.

The first year after seed germinates, the plant forms a rosette stage. During late May and June of the second year the plant grows to a height of one and one-half to four feet tall. The cover illustration is less than one-fourth the actual adult size. The lower portion of the stems has a distinct reddish-purplish color. Many of the young plants have a "woolly" appearance in the axis of the leaf and stem. The base of the leaves is attached directly to the main stock without any stem. The leaves are from 5 to 9 inches long, dark green with deep-cut edges. Flowers are golden yellow,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 inch across, and are borne in dense, flat-topped clusters.

Tansy ragwort has a fibrous root system without either rhizomes or stolons. Individual plants can be destroyed by removing the crown of the plant by pulling or digging.

### Seed spread

The rate of spread of tansy ragwort is very rapid. The seeds have appendages which carry them in the wind and are light enough to be carried in water. Seed coats are rough and cling to animal hair, wool, or feathers. New tansy ragwort plants frequently can be found several miles from known infected areas. Such rapid spread usually is attributed to seed spread by animals and birds.

Tansy ragwort is not a serious weed on lands which are regularly cultivated; however, it establishes itself by seed in perennial grass or legume fields. It is a serious weed problem in cut-over range lands. Not only because of its poisonous nature, but because it is a vigorous grower and crowds out more desirable pasture plants, tansy ragwort is a serious problem.

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## Poisonous Properties

Cattle and horses have been poisoned by consuming tansy ragwort plants in all stages of growth and under all feeding conditions. Most cases of poisoning occur from the accumulative effect of grazing the growing plant. Cattle seem to be poisoned most frequently, horses to a lesser extent; sheep frequently eat tansy ragwort without being poisoned. The more common symptoms recorded for cattle poisoned by tansy ragwort are: nervous irritability, occasional chills followed by paleness of mucous membranes, emaciation, staggering gait, weakness, and death. Postmortem examinations show liver lesions.

## Control

### Chemical control

During March, April, and May, 2,4-D sprays are the most effective and economical control methods. Two pounds of 2,4-D acid per acre during March and April and 3 pounds during May will kill the tansy plants. (Three to four tablespoons of 2,4-D testing  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 pounds per gallon to each 1 gallon of water.)

After the tansy ragwort starts to blossom, in early June through August, more rapid-acting chemicals are required for control. Such chemicals are: ammate, sodium chlorate, and atlacide or mixtures of sodium chlorate and borax. These chemicals should be used at the rate of one pound to each gallon of water with a complete wetting of the plants.

Sodium chlorate and atlacide should be used carefully because of livestock poisoning from the chemicals and fire from the use of such chemicals. Operators should wear clothes which can be discarded or washed after spraying. Chlorates should not be used where fire is hazardous during the summer dry period.

### Sheep pasturing

Sheep producers in coastal counties seed perennial grasses such as Chewings fescue, creeping red fescue, and alta fescue in newly logged areas. These grasses offer competition to the encroachment of tansy ragwort. They also provide sheep pasture. Sheep will keep the tansy ragwort under control with careful management.

Two other weeds also are called "tansy." They are less widespread in Oregon than is tansy ragwort. They do not spread so rapidly as tansy ragwort and are not so dangerous to livestock. Information concerning these other two weeds follows.

Tansy ragwort will not grow under dense shade. This makes control comparatively simple in rough forest areas.

### Seaside Tansy (*Tanacetum huronense*)

Seaside tansy grows from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet tall. Heads are a dull yellow, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch across. They are produced in small clusters at the tip of the stalk. Leaves are more lacy in appearance than tansy ragwort, and the whole plant is finer. Stems are somewhat woolly. Chemical control is similar to that of tansy ragwort. Tillage is a good method of control.



SEASIDE TANSY—*Tanacetum huronense*—Showing entire plant and seed.  
Seed magnified 3 diameters.

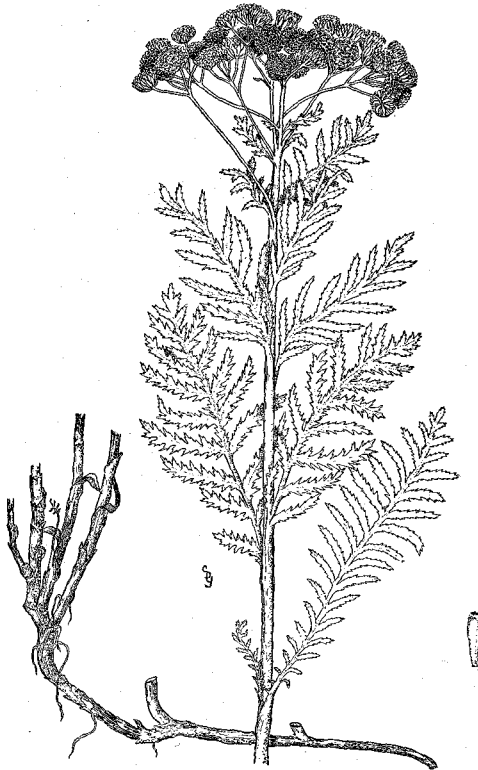
## Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Bitter buttons, Hind-head, and Parsley fern.

Tansy is the rankest growing of the three weeds mentioned in this bulletin. It often grows 5 feet in height. Leaves are larger than those of either of the others, often attaining 1 foot in length. The buttonlike heads are a dull golden brown, small, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch across, and grow in very compact clusters.

Tansy contains a poisonous oil called tanacetin; however, because of the bitter nature of the plant, it is seldom eaten by livestock.

Oil distilled from tansy and mixed with that of other plants, and diluted with alcohol, makes a "mosquito dope" useful to those who live in areas infested by mosquitoes.\* Control is similar to tansy ragwort.



TANSY—*Tanacetum vulgare*—Showing stem with leaves and flowers, nature of root growth, and seed. Seed magnified 3 diameters.

\* *Manual of Weeds* by Ada Georgia, Macmillan Company.