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Tansy Ragwort

... a Poisonous Weed

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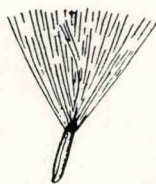
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MATURE PLANT



SEED



SEEDLING



SEEDLING

A Cooperative Extension Publication
Oregon Washington Idaho

Tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobea*) is one of the more serious weed problems in western Oregon and Washington. Tansy ragwort, as many other troublesome weeds, was introduced into the United States from Europe. The first reported observation of this weed was in 1922. Tansy ragwort is most commonly found on the Coast Range area and is one of the first plants to invade cutover forest lands. It is not usually found in annually tilled fields. However, it can invade irrigated pastures, perennial seed fields, and sometimes is found in the margins of alfalfa fields.

Tansy ragwort usually is a biennial plant. However, under some conditions, plants live over as perennials. Most seeds germinate the first fall, form a rosette the following year, and blossom the next season. Unless the plants are damaged, they normally die after blossoming. However, when plants are cut or broken during the second year, they can blossom the third year; thus, they are sometimes perennial.

Tansy ragwort is a very conspicuous plant when it blooms. The daisylike golden yellow flowers have a long blossoming period. The rosette plants have irregularly lobed leaves with a visible blade region near the tip. The leaves, 5 to 9 inches long and dark green in color, are attached directly to the main stalk.

The plant spreads principally by seed. Individual plants will have as many as 150,000 seeds. Most of these seeds fall within a few hundred feet of the parent plant. However, some can be carried greater distances by wind and water. The rough seed coats readily attach to hair and wool of livestock and wildlife and to feathers of birds.

Poisonous Properties

Tansy ragwort is not a highly poisonous plant, but all portions of the plant are poisonous. It is reported to contain six different alkaloid poisons. Fortunately, tansy ragwort plants are not very palatable; therefore, they are not eaten by cattle and horses if more palatable plants are available. Sheep consume tansy ragwort plants readily, and they are less susceptible to poisoning by tansy ragwort than cattle and horses. In livestock, most cases of poisoning are caused by an accumulative build-up of poisonous alkaloids.

Control

The most commonly used herbicide for the control of tansy ragwort is 2,4-D. Good control has been obtained by spraying in the rosette stage of growth (late April or May) with 3 pounds (3 quarts) of the ester of 2,4-D in 50 gallons of water. For small hand equipment, use 4 tablespoons of 2,4-D containing 3 to 4 pounds per gallon, in 1 gallon of water. Plants must be wet thoroughly for good control; plants die slowly after being sprayed. Controlling tansy ragwort with 2,4-D is not effective after the plants start to bloom. Observe grazing restrictions on the label.

One pound (1 quart) of dicamba (Banvel) in 50 gallons of water is effective in controlling tansy ragwort. Use wetting agents according to the dicamba label. The best control has been obtained when sprays are applied before tansy ragwort blossoms. Observe grazing restrictions on the label.

Soil sterilants, such as sodium chlorate and borate-chlorate mixtures, are effective in controlling tansy ragwort but are less practical to use because of cost. Sodium chlorate is a fire hazard, so it must be used cautiously.

Control by Grazing

Sheep grazing has proven to be an effective way of controlling tansy ragwort. Fences are needed to confine the sheep to tansy ragwort infested areas; sheep should be grazed in these areas for several years. Most of the tansy ragwort is consumed in the seedling and rosette stages of growth, rather than in the flowering stage.

Other Control Methods

Tansy ragwort is not a shade-tolerant plant. Reforestation is a good way of controlling tansy ragwort, but this requires many years. Biological control methods are being studied. Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaea*) shows promise of controlling tansy ragwort. The cinnabar moth has been released in Oregon, and has shown evidence of some control. A research program is being developed at Oregon State University for more efficient use of this biological control agent.

At present, practical control is obtained by timely spraying, sheep grazing, reforestation, and tillage.

Dune Tansy
(*Tanacetum camphoratum*)

Dune tansy grows from 1/2 to 1-1/2 feet tall. Heads are a dull yellow, about 1/2 inch across. They are produced in small clusters at the tip of the stalk. Leaves are more lacy in appearance than those of 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.

Tansy
(*Tanacetum vulgare*)

Other Common Names: Bitter buttons, hind-head, and parsley fern

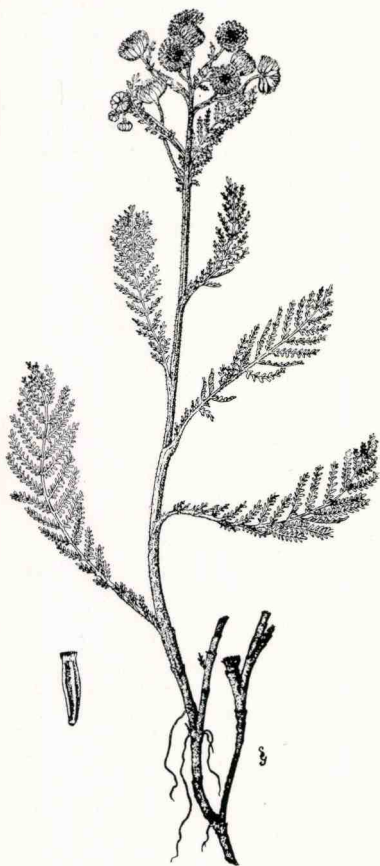
Tansy is the rankest growing of the three weeds mentioned in this bulletin.

It often grows 5 feet in height. Leaves are larger than those of either of the other plants, often attaining 1 foot in length. The buttonlike heads are a dull golden brown, small, about 1/4 inch across, and they grow in very compact clusters.

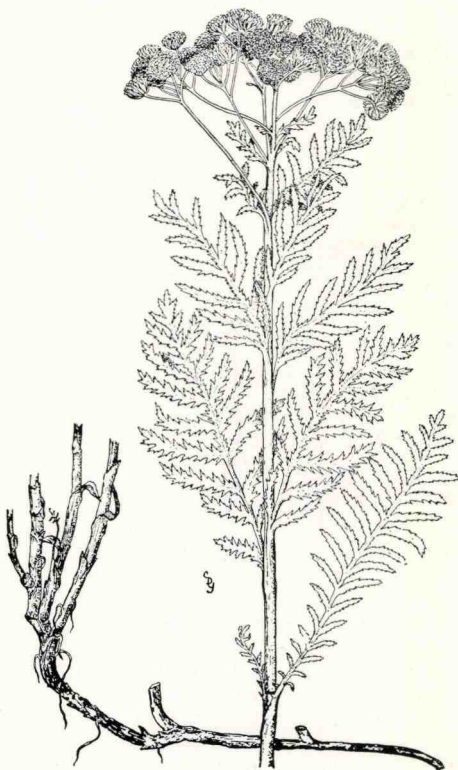
Tansy contains a poisonous oil called tanacetin; however, because of the bitter nature of the plant, it is seldom eaten by livestock.

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

Idaho weed workers report the best control of tansy with 2 pounds of Silvex per acre; for spot spraying, 1 tablespoon in a gallon of water.



DUNE TANSY—*Tanacetum camphoratum*
—Showing entire plant and seed. Seed magnified 3 diameters.



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



Prepared by Ron Burr, Extension farm crops specialist, Oregon State University, in cooperation with specialists at Washington State University and the University of Idaho.

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