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# TANSY RAGWORT

*... a Poisonous Weed*

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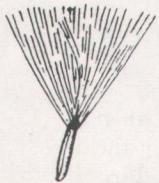
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# TANSY RAGWORT

## ... *A Poisonous Weed*

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Tansy ragwort, *Senecio jacobea*, is one of western Oregon's most serious weed problems. Tansy ragwort, as many other troublesome weeds, was introduced to the United States from Europe. The first reported observation of this weed in Oregon was in 1922. Tansy ragwort is most commonly found in the Coast Range area and is one of the first plants to invade cut-over forest lands. It is not usually found in annually tilled fields. However, it can invade irrigated pastures 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 plants are not very palatable; therefore, they are not eaten by cattle and horses if more palatable plants are available. Sheep consume tansy 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 one gallon of water. Plants must be wet thoroughly

for good control; plants die slowly after being sprayed. Controlling tansy with 2, 4-D is not effective after the plants start to bloom.

Research at Oregon State University shows picloram (Tordon) to be an effective herbicide for controlling tansy ragwort. The suggested rate is  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound (one quart) in 50 gallons of water. Picloram, even though it kills the tansy ragwort plant slowly, prevents the germination of mature seeds. Picloram is not cleared for use in areas that are grazed.

One pound (1 quart) of dicamba (Banvel D) 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. Dicamba is not approved for use in grazing areas.

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 infested areas; sheep should be grazed in these areas for several years. Most of the tansy 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, but this requires many years. Biological control methods are being studied. Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaea*) shows promise of controlling tansy ragwort. The ragwort moth has been released in Oregon. To date, the insects have not increased in large enough numbers to control the plant.

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

## **Dune Tansy**

*(Tanacetum camphoratum)*

Dune 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 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.

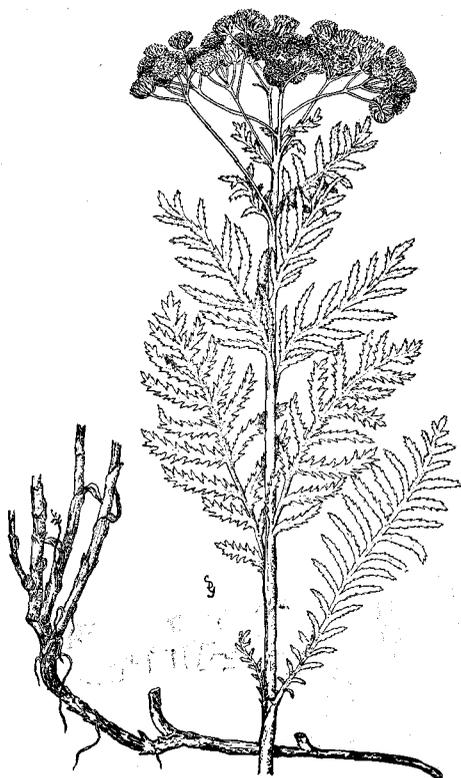
## **Tansy**

*(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 one foot in length. The buttonlike heads are a dull



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



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

golden brown, small, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  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, one tablespoon in a gallon of water.

Picloram (Tordon) at 2 pounds per 100 gallons of water (1 cup in 6 gallons of water) and spraying to wet also controls tansy.