

Ragwort

Senecio jacobaea

Ragwort is a serious pasture weed with the ability to rapidly spread and invade clean areas, leading to reduced pasture production and ongoing maintenance. In addition the toxic substances contained in ragwort endanger grazing animals causing damage to their liver.

As ragwort is disliked by cattle, pasture close to it is avoided, further enhancing the smothering effect and reducing pasture utilisation. Sheep eat ragwort without ill-effect unless continually exposed to the plant.

Status

Ragwort is a declared plant pest in designated areas of the Auckland Region. In areas where it is a Total Control Plant Pest land occupiers are required to control all infestations of this plant before seeding, should it be found growing on their land. Where it is a Boundary Control Plant Pest land occupiers are required



to control all infestations of this plant which are situated 50 metres or less from a neighbouring property that is clear of, or being cleared of ragwort.

For information about the ragwort control areas, contact your local Biosecurity officer.

Origin

Originating from Europe, ragwort has now spread to many temperate parts of the world, becoming a prominent pasture weed in most. It was introduced to New Zealand before 1874 and is now common throughout both islands being found in waste places, riverbeds, open forests, swamps, as well as pastures.

Description

Ragwort is an erect biennial or perennial herb that reproduces from crowns, roots and seeds.

Stems are reddish/purple at the base and rise up to 60cm, branching out at the top. Bright yellow flowers form large heads at the end of each branch. The leaves are deeply divided and wrinkled, dark green on top and have a paler green, downy lining.

The young plant develops into a rosette which, by summer, can be between 2 to 5cm and up to 15cm in diameter. Ragwort plants develop into a cabbage type growth form and are easily identified at this stage.

Invasion

Seeds provide the main method of ragwort invasion with one plant producing up to 250,000 seeds. They are spread by wind, water, animals (both domestic and wild), vehicles, clothing and via hay or chaff. Cutting, grazing and ineffective chemical control can all stimulate regeneration from the crown, converting biennial plants to perennials. Dispersal can also occur from roots and pieces of crown being cut by cultivation equipment.

Control

While a number of control options exist, its important land holders experiment with a combination of suggested controls to suit their needs. The following control methods provide a range of options currently utilised on many New Zealand properties but the two key components of any control programme are persistence and hard work.

Grazing Management;- maintaining a vigorous, dense pasture helps reduce the incidence of ragwort invasion. On beef and sheep farms ragwort can be controlled by sheep stocked at three units per hectare, as part of an overall minimum stocking rate of 11 units per hectare. Mob stocking of sheep four times between spring and autumn can also achieve good control.

Chemical control;-suitable herbicides can be applied using traditional boom spray equipment, knapsack sprayers, carpet rollers, and weed wipers, while granulated formulations can also be used for spot treatment of isolated plants.

Overall boom spraying of pasture is normally carried out in autumn and winter/early spring. After boom spraying, it is essential that an ongoing spot-spraying programme is maintained. Spot spraying with suitable herbicides can successfully be carried out up until flowering. It should be noted that plants near flowering can be difficult to kill and plants should be sprayed before seeds begin to appear.

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1. Seedlings & small rosettes (winter/early spring)

- Boomspray 2,4-D 1 to 3litres/ha in 300 litres water
Pasture- Kleen..... 2 to 4litres/ha in 200 to 300 litres of water

2. Larger plants (up to early flowering)

- Gunspray Tordon 50D 400ml/100 litres water
Escort 5gms/100 litres water
Knapsack Tordon 50D 125ml/10 litres water
Escort 1gm/10 litres water
Mistblower (U.L.V) Tordon 50D 1 litre/7 litres water with No 3 tip.

Weedwiper/Carpet roller

- Roundup 1 part/2 parts water
Escort 1gm/ 1 litre water
Granules
Tordon 2G 1 teaspoon to crushed centre of plant
Prefix D 1/4 teaspoon to crushed centre of plant.

Grubbing;- grubbing or pulling ragwort is best done at the full to late flowering stage when the roots are much less likely to regrow. If grubbing is done in the rosette to early flowering stage, root fragments left in the soil are likely to grow again. The flower heads of pulled plants should be burned.

Mowing;- this option is not recommended, despite making the paddock look tidier, it encourages the development of multiple crown, perennial ragwort plants.

CAUTION: When using any herbicide READ THE LABEL thoroughly and ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

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