

PLANT PEST CONTROL

LAND PLANT PESTS

Ragwort: *Senecio jacobea*

Why are we worried?

Ragwort is poisonous to cattle and, if incorporated into hay or silage, it becomes more palatable but still retains its toxic qualities. Sheep are less susceptible, but can suffer liver damage if fed large amounts of flowering Ragwort, which can lead to deaths.

Ragwort can establish and spread in many habitats, especially where sheep are not grazing. It is a problem on dairy, deer and bull beef farms. Each plant can produce from 30,000 to 150,000 seeds of which up to 90% are viable.

What does Ragwort look like?

Ragwort, a native plant of Europe, is a biennial but plants can also flower in less than a year. It grows from a strong rootstock which produces erect, purple, flowering stems up to 1.5m tall.

The rosette leaves are stalked, and pinnate, with wavy toothed lobes, which usually wither before flowering. Ragwort flowers are bright golden yellow, with many little flowers.

Where is Ragwort found?

Ragwort is found throughout Hawke's Bay. It grows mainly in wetter, high rainfall areas, and particularly where sheep are not grazed, for example on dairy, deer and beef farms.

What is the best way to control ragwort?

Chemical control of ragwort is a problem because the herbicides used also damage clover, reducing pasture production.

The chemical 2,4-DB is only effective on seedlings, is harmless to clover, but has little effect on large Ragwort plants. The most commonly used chemical for boom spraying ragwort in pastures is 2,4-D.

To minimise clover damage, winter spraying is recommended, but the most effective time to spray the plants is in spring.



After a winter spray, spot treatments of Ragwort can be effective using any of the recommended herbicides. This can be done with some of the non-hormone chemicals, using very low rates, even with drench gun applications.

Granules applied to an individual plant and crushed with a heel gives excellent spot treatment control. However, if large areas are treated with granules containing picloram or dicamba, severe clover damage can result.

Grubbing or pulling of Ragwort in the rosette to early flowering stage can result in regrowth from root fragments remaining in the soil. However, the roots of plants pulled at full to late flowering are much less likely to regrow. The flower heads of pulled plants should be burnt or destroyed as seeds may strike.

Mowing at the early flowering stage is not recommended as it encourages the plant to develop a multi-crown or to become a perennial plant making control very difficult.

Biological Controls

Biological control agents include the Cinnabar Moth and the Ragwort Flea Beetle. When both of these are combined at one site, excellent suppression of ragwort can be achieved. The Cinnabar Moth is active before Christmas, and the Flea Beetle in the late summer and autumn. Together they result in very little seed setting.

Grazing with sheep at two to three per hectare can control young ragwort. Some stock preferentially graze ragwort, and as long as stock are periodically removed from ragwort areas, the animals remain healthy.

For further information

If you think you may have this plant pest on your property, please contact the Biosecurity Plants Officers at Hawke's Bay Regional Council for advice and we will work with you to eradicate it.

Wairoa	0-6-838 8527
Napier	0-6-835 9200
Waipukurau	0-6-858 8636
TOLL FREE	0800 108 808