

Tansy Ragwort

Senecio jacobaea

Family; Asteraceae (Aster Family)

Common Names: Stinking Willie, Staggerwort

Species Affected: Equines (particularly susceptible), Cows, Sheep, Alpacas, Llamas, and goats.

Toxin: Numerous Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids. As little as 3% of body weight and 20 days of ingestion can be lethal.

Description: Is a tall, coarse, herbaceous, biennial, winter annual, or occasional perennial, up to 3 ft tall, tough upright stems, often red-tinged at the base, and branching above the middle. The basal rosette typically dies when the plant begins to bolt but the stem leaves stay. The composite (daisy-like) flowers are small, bright yellow, and numerous, in dense, flat-topped clusters.

Growing Locations: Found in roadsides, fields, and pastures, throughout North America, particularly in the Atlantic and Pacific coast regions. Tansy Ragwort have the capability to take over any once productive pastureland.

Most Toxic When: In very degraded pastures where good food forage is scarce. It is equally toxic when dried or in hay, actually, Ragwort becomes more palatable when dry for grazing animals.

Signs and Symptoms: Most effects are liver-related or neurological. It can take months for symptoms to present, so Tansy Ragwort is often not considered as the reason. Once symptoms are observed decline is typically rapid. Chronic liver disease and damage, including, lethargy, fluid buildup in the abdomen, loss of vision, lack of appetite, Secondary photosensitization, diarrhea, unusual odor, head-pressing, rectal prolapse in cattle, sleep staggers or walking disease, coma, and death.

Preventative Measures: Tansy Ragwort has a long flowering season and produces large numbers of seeds, which stay viable in the soil for several years. Ragwort also reproduces by root fragments. Seeds are easily spread by wildlife, people, and machinery. The best control is achieved before it begins to mature and flower to reduce seed production.

Cultural– Good pasture management, promoting and seeding areas with competitive healthy forage.

Mechanical– Protective gear must be worn. Pulling small infestations can be effective but make sure to get the entire plant and root system. Mowing can temporarily prevent plants from flowering but more control measures will need to be taken in that same year.

Chemical– During rosette or bolting stage, use a systemic, selective broadleaf herbicide. 2,4-D, clopyralid, other smaller auxinic herbicides will be effective.

Caution Wilted plants are more palatable than healthy plants, so always dispose of hand-pulled plant material. Do not apply herbicide to Ragwort where animals are grazing and remove dead plants before allowing animals back into the pasture.

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