



#### DESCRIPTION

Ragwort – *Senecio jacobaea*

Ragwort is normally a biennial plant that germinates in autumn, and then flowers, seeds and dies between 1 and 2 years after germination. However some plants, especially if they have been mowed, slashed or ineffectually sprayed, become multi-crowned perennials and are more difficult to kill.

During its first year ragwort is a rosette, but the flowering stage sees it form upright, leafy, flower-topped stems that rise to 50-120cm above ground level.

The flowers are distinctively bright yellow and are clearly visible from some distance away.

Ragwort prefers well-drained, fertile soils and thrives where pasture is weak or open. It spreads via its prolific seed output; one plant can produce over 200,000 seeds, and seed will remain viable for more than 10 years.

Ragwort is a poisonous plant that can be extremely toxic to cattle and horses, but less so to sheep and goats which will often eat it without harm. Susceptible animals will normally avoid eating growing ragwort, but this does lead to poor pasture utilization because they will also avoid grazing close to the plants.

Another problem is that as ragwort dies it becomes both more palatable and more toxic, so it is critical that stock are kept out of a paddock with sprayed ragwort for at least 2-3 weeks while the danger passes. For the same reason, incorporating ragwort plants into silage or hay is very dangerous to stock.

#### PHYSICAL CONTROL

Grazing systems with sheep or goats will usually prevent ragwort domination of pasture, but in dairy and cattle-only systems this is not feasible. Maintaining dense pastures will minimise seed germination, but on dairy units in winter and early spring this is difficult due to pugging.

Grubbing or pulling of ragwort plants is ineffective up to the early flowering stage because any root fragments remaining in the soil will re-grow. From late flowering this regrowth becomes less likely, and physical removal is more useful. However, it is essential that flower heads of removed plants are burned to destroy the seed.



Mowing is never recommended because the cut ragwort plants will re-grow, generally in the form of much harder to kill multi-crown perennials.

#### HERBICIDE CONTROL

Generally the control of ragwort requires the use of a two-stage approach; spot treatment of larger and multi-crown plants through autumn, and then boom spraying of seedling and rosette-stage plants in winter. Some follow-up spot treatment of any survivors can be required through the next spring.

##### Boom Spraying:

- **2,4-D Granules** at 2-3kg/Ha applied to seedlings and small rosettes in winter. Does no clover damage as clover is dormant at spraying.

For the critical spot and follow-up treatments in autumn and spring respectively, there are several options:

##### Spot Spraying:

- **GrassMate** herbicide spot sprayed at 6ml/L. This is grass friendly, but will damage clover.
- **MSF600** brushweed spray, spot sprayed at just 2.5g/100L for rosettes and smaller plants, or 5g/100L for multi-crown plants. This is not a grass-friendly option.

Note: If grass damage is NOT a concern, then by far the cheapest and most effective spray is MSF600. Ragwort at all growth stages is extremely susceptible to this active ingredient (in Australia, where native grass pastures are not susceptible, this herbicide is successfully aerial sprayed over dense ragwort infestations at just 20g/Ha).

##### Dry Spot Treatment:

- **BuckShot** granules applied dry at 2g (half a level teaspoon) to the crushed centre of each plant.

##### Weed Wiper:

- **MSF600** applied in a weed wiper at around 2g per 5L of water is extremely effective against ragwort plants once they have sufficient volume standing erect above the pasture level. Hard grazing prior to application will allow the best results because of lower wiping height. Make double passes, in opposite directions. Repeat treatment after 6 weeks for best long term results.