

Tansy Ragwort



Senecio jacobaea L.

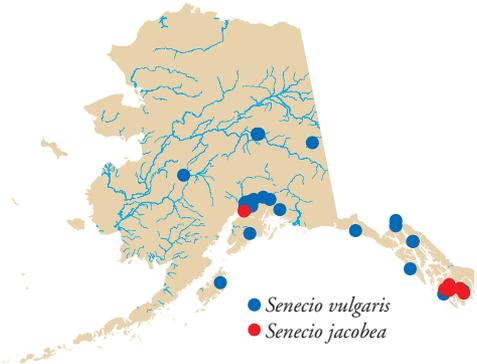
Alternate Names

Common ragwort, staggerwort

Description

Tansy ragwort is a biennial or perennial plant with one to several stems growing 1–4 feet tall from a taproot.

Leaves are deeply cut. Basal leaves have stalks and are 2–8 inches long. Ascending the stem, leaves become smaller and stalks become shorter. Leaves are alternate, equally distributed, and generally 2–3 times pinnately lobed with the terminal lobe larger than the lateral ones. Flowerheads are borne in terminal clusters and consist of yellow ray and disc florets. There are 10–13 ray florets per flowerhead that are $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch long. The fruits of the disk florets are minutely hairy, while those of the ray florets are hairless.



Tansy ragwort.

UAF Cooperative Extension Service photo
by Michael Rasy

Similar Species

Hultén (1968) describes 19 *Senecio* species in Alaska, most of which are native, with the exception of common groundsel (*S. vulgaris* L.) and desert ragwort (*S. eremophilus* Phil.). Common groundsel is an annual weed reported from multiple regions of Alaska and can be differentiated from other species by its deeply pinnatifid leaves that lack the feathery appearance of tansy ragwort leaves. Desert ragwort can be distinguished from other species by the presence of leaves that are shallowly pinnatifid and not reduced upward. Sticky ragwort (*S. viscosus* L.) is another species

that may show up in Alaska in the future and is similar to common groundsel but sticky-haired throughout, whereas common groundsel is hairless. Common tansy leaves (*Tanacetum vulgare* L., included in this book) resemble those of tansy ragwort, but the ray florets are either minute or absent.

Ecological Impact

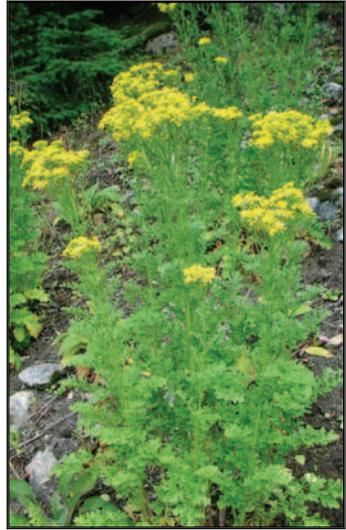
Tansy ragwort is poisonous to livestock. The plant contains a toxic alkaloid that reacts with enzymes to cause cumulative liver damage. Ingestion of the plant causes livestock to stagger, hence the common name staggerwort. It is estimated that the state of Oregon has lost four million dollars a year to livestock poisoning by this species.

Biology and Invasive Potential

Tansy ragwort usually germinates in fall or early winter, lives through the next year as a rosette, and then dies the following year after producing flowers and seeds. A single large plant may produce up to 150,000 seeds that can lie dormant in the soil for as long as 15 years. The fibrous root system can produce small adventitious shoots when stimulated by mechanical destruction or pulling (King County DNR 2004a). Seeds are tiny and are tipped by hairlike plumes that can carry seeds in the wind over long distances. Tansy ragwort is listed as a noxious weed in Washington, Idaho, and British Columbia.

Distribution and Abundance

Tansy ragwort is native to Eurasia and is now widespread in California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, infesting millions of acres of range and pasture



XID Services photo by Richard Old

Tansy ragwort.



KULAK photo by Paul Busselen

Sticky ragwort.

land. In Alaska, this species has been found in Ketchikan, on Annette Island, on Prince of Wales Island, and in Anchorage. It was first reported in North American seaports in the early 1900s and is often spread in contaminated hay.

Management

Hand-pulling tansy ragwort before seed set can be effective. Herbicide application is effective for controlling large infestations, although follow-up treatments may be necessary. Biological control agents, including seedhead flies, root and defoliating beetles, and a defoliating moth, provide fair to excellent control for very large infestations (Callihan and Miller 1999). Seeding disturbed areas with perennial grasses may help to prevent reestablishment.

Notes

Tansy ragwort is extremely poisonous to horses, while at least 30 species of invertebrates are totally dependent on it for food in Europe.



XID Services photo by Richard Old

Common groundsel.