Tansy ragwort

Western Invasive Plant Fact Sheet #5

Jacobaea vulgaris

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Scan or Click for more management information

Quick Facts: Tansy ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*, also known as *Senecio jacobaea*) is a forb in the aster family that is native to Eurasia. It has clusters of bright yellow flowers and deeply lobed, ruffled leaves. All parts of the plant are toxic to livestock and humans, and ingestion can be lethal to cattle and horses. It can also contaminate agricultural products such as hay, posing both health and economic risks to agricultural production. Tansy ragwort establishes readily in open, disturbed areas such as roadsides, pastures, and cleared forestlands. It grows best on well-drained soils in cool, moist climates, and rarely tolerates high water tables or acidic soils. It especially colonizes sparsely vegetated areas as dense coverage of competitive vegetation can limit seedling establishment.

Invasion Strategy: Tansy ragwort spreads primarily by seed, but can also reproduce vegetatively. A single plant can produce thousands of wind-dispersed seeds that remain viable in the soil for over a decade. Populations expand rapidly, with documented infestations spreading across landscapes in just a few years. Tansy ragwort has a taproot and often a large, woody rootstock. While typically a biennial, it can behave as a perennial when flowering stems are cut, mowed, or otherwise damaged. Plants may resprout from crown buds, root fragments, or intact roots, and can reflower within the same season if flowers are removed before seed set.

Identifying Features: Tansy ragwort is most commonly encountered in its biennial form. In the first year, it grows as a basal rosette of dark green leaves. In the second year, one or more flowering stems emerge, reaching 1–4 feet tall. Other identifying features include:

- Grows as a biennial, perennial, or winter annual
- Basal rosette leaves that are often deciduous and have hairy undersides that may give a whitish appearance.
- Stem leaves are alternate
- Flower heads are bright yellow and daisy-like, and occur in clusters of 20 to 60.
- Flowers usually have 13 ‘petals’ (ray flowers)

Tansy ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris*

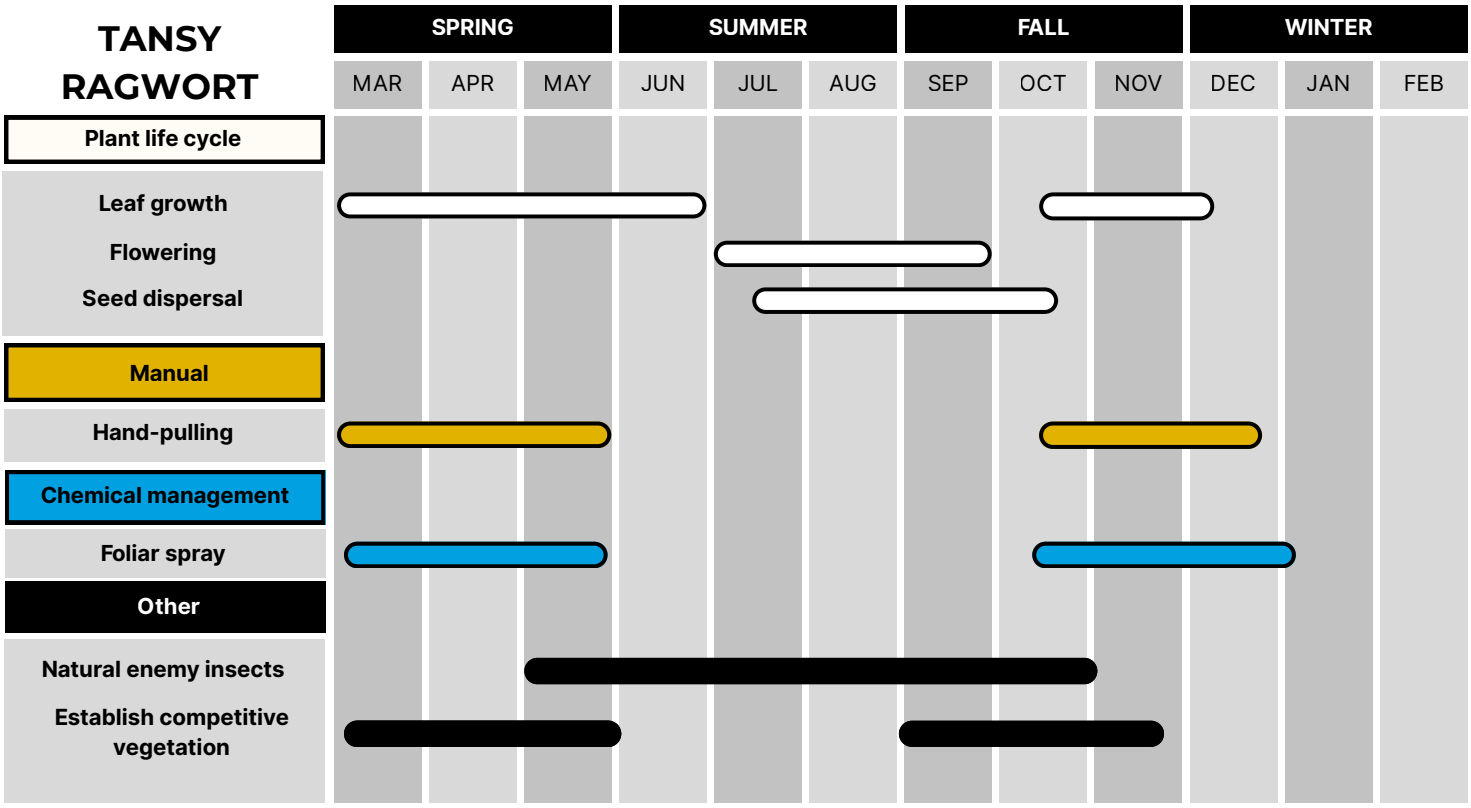


Table 1. This chart is based on USDA plant hardiness zone 7. Plant growth and treatment times vary by region.

Management Methods:

Manual - Hand-pulling or digging can be effective for small infestations, but it is important to remove the entire root, as plants can re-sprout from root fragments.

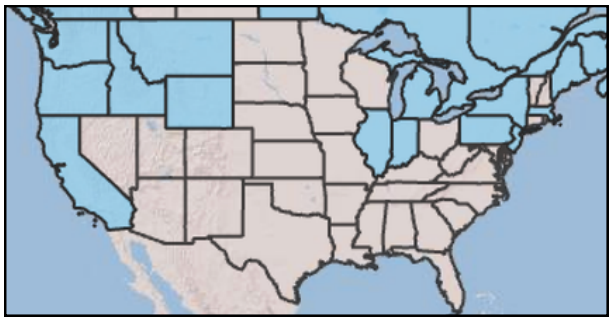
Mechanical - Mowing is not effective long-term, as plants may re-sprout and behave as perennials.

Chemical - Foliar sprays can be effective when applied to new growth in spring or fall.

Biological - The ragwort flea beetle (*Longitarsus jacobaeae*), ragwort seed fly (*Pegohylemyia seneciella*), and cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) can help control populations.

Disclaimer - Selecting the best management method for this plant can be site- and context-specific. Check with your local USDA Service Center or University Extension agent to explore your options and determine what is most appropriate for your location and situation.

Management Information: Dispose of cut plant materials where they cannot resprout. If seeds are present, bag them and dispose of them in a landfill. Equipment should be cleaned after management. Personal protective equipment is recommended when removing any invasive species, and especially when using herbicides. Always follow label instructions when using herbicide!



Species present Absent

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Tansy ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris*

Look-alike species: Tansy ragwort resembles other weedy species from the aster family. It is especially easy to confuse with common tansy.

Common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) is another invasive weedy aster with lobed green leaves and yellow flowers. However, it differs from Tansy ragwort in several ways including:

- Flowers are button-shaped, lacking 'petals' (ray flowers)
- Less toxic to livestock
- Perennial and reproduces through rhizomes
- Leaves are more 'fern-like' than the ruffled leaves of tansy ragwort (Figure 6)

Figure 5

Figure 6

References and Additional Reading:

- Oregon Flora Project *Senecio jacobaea* [Identification, geographic range]
- Oregon State University Solve Pest Problems guide Tansy ragwort [Identification, management]
- Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbooks Tansy ragwort [Chemical management]
- Washington Noxious Weed Control Board Tansy ragwort [Best management practices, additional references]
- Written findings of the WA Weed Control Board: Tansy ragwort, [History and management]

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- Figure 6: iNaturalist, clarheart
- Range map: USDA PLANTS Database

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