Weeds of Western Australia - Ragwort (Senecio jacobaea L.)

G. R. W. Meadly

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture3

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture3/vol7/iss2/7

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 3 by an authorized administrator of Research Library. For more information, please contact jennifer.heathcote@agric.wa.gov.au, sandra.papenfus@agric.wa.gov.au, paul.orange@dpird.wa.gov.au.
Ragwort is recorded as being native to Europe, Siberia and North-Western India, but has spread to many other countries, including North America, New Zealand and Australia. Besides competing strongly with pasture species it has been responsible for losses among stock.
RAGWORT is a biennial or perennial herb native to Europe, Siberia and North-Western India. It is recorded as a weed in parts of its natural habitat, particularly in England, and has also spread to other countries, including North America, New Zealand and Australia. In Canada it is found in all provinces on the Atlantic seaboard and also occurs in the United States. Conditions have proved very favourable in New Zealand where Ragwort thrives on large tracts of country.

Ragwort is widespread in parts of Victoria, particularly in Southern Gippsland and is a troublesome weed in Tasmania where dense stands develop. It also occurs on the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales. Ragwort was first recorded in Western Australia in 1940 when a Manjimup farmer, noticing an unusual plant, forwarded a specimen to the Department of Agriculture for identification. An inspection revealed that the weed was restricted to about 100 square yards of pasture on partly-cleared land. The plants were mainly clustered together and could have originated from a single plant.

Following the publicity given to this occurrence an observant settler reported the weed on his property at Pemberton. Both areas were treated with sodium chlorate and no plants have been found at either site in recent years, underlining the importance of early recognition of weeds.

The history of its appearance in both localities indicated that the weed had been introduced as an impurity in agricultural seeds. In recent years a further infestation has been located at Walpole where control measures are being undertaken. This is the only known area of Ragwort in Western Australia.

DESCRIPTION

Ragwort is a biennial or perennial herb, reaching a height of 2-3 ft. from a short thick root-stock which divides with age. The erect stems are usually a bright purple in colour. The leaves are pinnate with ovate or narrow, coarsely-toothed segments, the terminal ones being larger. The basal leaves have long stalks, while the uppermost are sessile. The yellow flowers are abundant, the heads being in compact or broad terminal corymbs. The small seeds have a feathery pappus and a single plant may produce as many as 50,000 seeds each year. Flowering occurs during the summer months.

Wort is an alternative name for weed and “rag” is probably an abbreviation of “ragged,” descriptive of the leaf edges. The plant is also called Tansy ragwort and Staggerwort.

SIGNIFICANCE

Ragwort is a weed of pasture land and waste places rather than arable land. The vigorous growth, particularly of basal leaves, makes it a very strong competitor. It is most likely to intrude into unthrifty pastures where bare patches occur and is of less significance when competing with strongly-growing perennial pasture species.
RAGWORT
(Senecio Jacobaea L.)

A.—Plant showing stock and basal leaves along with stem leaves and flowers. About one foot of the central portion of the stem has been removed; B—Details of stock and basal leaves; C.—Single basal leaf; D and E.—Flower heads, the latter showing the dark-tipped bracts; F and G.—Single flowers; H.—Achene (seed).

(From a pen drawing by the Government Botanist, C. A. Gardner.)
Another characteristic, however, renders it more serious as a weed. Certain diseases of stock in various parts of the world have been attributed to species of *Senecio*, especially *Senecio Jacobaea*. These troubles include “Pictou disease” of cattle and horses in Canada, “Winton disease” of horses in New Zealand and “Molteno disease” of cattle in South Africa. A common feature of all these is the development of hepatic cirrhosis in the affected animals. Symptoms appear after a considerable quantity of the plant has been ingested, and cases of losses among horses and cattle have been reported from all countries where the weed occurs abundantly. An alkaloid is considered to be responsible.

Formerly, sheep were regarded as being immune, but experiments have disproved this assumption. They are less likely to be affected than horses and cattle, however, and in New Zealand, heavy stocking with sheep has been used as a control measure. This must be done with discretion, however, if ill effects are to be avoided.

Ragwort is a declared primary noxious weed for the entire State.

**CONTROL**

As already mentioned, Ragwort seeds very freely and the seeds can be carried considerable distances by the wind. Every effort should be made, therefore, to prevent seed formation. If cut at the flowering stage and left, at least a proportion of the seeds will mature. Owing to the strong perennial root development, grubbing must be carried out very thoroughly if it is to prove effective and spasmodic cultivation serves to distribute rather than eradicate the weed.

Pasture improvement is giving good results on some bad infestations in Victoria. Where practicable, the area is ploughed and, following two consecutive years of cropping, is sown with vigorous pasture species. The objectives are to obtain maximum shading and smothering from the crops followed by competition from the pastures.

Chemicals are also effective and their use has been practicable with the restricted areas of Ragwort found in Western Australia. With the early infestations, a 5 per cent. solution of sodium chlorate proved effective but, latterly the growth-regulating herbicides, have been used. From 1½ to 2 lb. acid equivalent of 2, 4-D ester per acre is sufficient for seedlings but higher rates approximating 4 lb. per acre are used for established plants. This treatment would kill or severely affect most clovers. For this reason and also because of the cost, spot spraying rather than boom application is recommended. Low-volume treatment is seldom effective. The best time for spraying appears to be when the flowering shoot is making rapid growth but before the buds have commenced opening.

**KEEP YOUR JOURNALS**

Here at the production end, we are sparing neither expense nor effort in making the “Journal of Agriculture” a publication which will help you in your farming operations.

We suggest that the Journal is worth keeping and that a year’s issue will make an attractive and useful volume for your library—a volume that is full of sound factual information, attractively presented.

Arrangements have been made for the compilation of a comprehensive index to be incorporated in the December issue—a feature which will greatly enhance the value of the Journal as a work of reference.
ICl 'Malapruft is a new dual-purpose Miscible Oil which effectively controls Red Legged Earth Mite and Lucerne Flea from infesting your crops and pastures. Kill'em-quick and save time and money with 'Malapruft'.

For control of Red Legged Earth Mite only, spray with 'Pespruf' 20.

For control of Lucerne Flea only, spray with ICI Malathion 50.

Available from your Usual Supplier

A DEPENDABLE PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCT
IMPERIAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND LTD.