



Leaf



Rosette

Ragwort is one of five injurious weeds specified in The Weeds Act 1959. If eaten, ragwort causes long-term cumulative liver damage in livestock and other animals, and can have potentially fatal consequences. The Weeds Act 1959 empowers the Secretary of State to take action to prevent the spread of Common ragwort and the other injurious weeds covered by the Act. The Ragwort Control Act came into force on 20 February 2004 and amends The Weeds Act, and enables the Secretary of State to produce and release a Code of Practice on how to prevent the spread of Common ragwort.

The Weeds Act does not make it an offence to permit injurious weeds to grow on land. However, the Secretary of State has permissive powers to serve a notice on an occupier of any land on which injurious weeds are growing requiring action to be taken to prevent weeds spreading.

Life Cycle

Common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) produces 'rosettes' – profusions of low-lying, spreading leaves around a central stem – in its first year, which will remain throughout the first winter. Ragwort will usually flower in its second season, producing characteristic yellow inflorescences from late June onwards that typically extend to between 30-100cm in height. It is biennial when undisturbed but can develop perennial characteristics following cutting or treating. Ragwort occurs in neglected grass fields, on uncropped ground and sand dunes. It prefers light soils of low fertility, particularly in over or under-grazed pasture.

Ragwort control

Prevention is the best form of control. Good grass land management, which keeps the grass sward tight, will minimise the chance of ragwort establishing.

If land is affected by ragwort there are a number of control options available. The most suitable method of control will depend on circumstances, including time or cost limiting factors. To be successful all control methods should be accompanied by improved grassland management techniques.

Control options include digging or pulling up plants, cutting and stem removal, and/or treatment with selective herbicides. There is now an environmentally friendly product containing citronella oil available for spot treatment of ragwort. Treatments should be carried out at the right time by trained operators with the appropriate protective clothing. Ragwort is more susceptible to effective herbicide treatment whilst still in its 'rosette' stage.

