

Invasive plant species

Common Ragwort

What is Common Ragwort?

Common Ragwort is a native plant to the British Isles and is one of five species of Ragwort, the common variety is the only one that is covered by law as an invasive species. It is widespread throughout the UK and found on wasteland, roadsides, grasslands, urban parks and woodland. This plant can be toxic to grazing animals, especially horses, ponies and donkeys.

Identification

Ragwort usually grows to 30–90cm high, but can exceed 100cm. When in flower, usually from June until late October, it has easily recognisable bright yellow flowers arranged in clusters at the top of the plant.



Why control?

In some circumstances Ragwort does need control. Common Ragwort can be toxic to grazing animals if eaten. Control is needed in areas where land is used for grazing animals or vegetation is cut for feed or forage. Control may also be needed on land surrounding grazing areas.

It is the responsibility of the landowner or occupier to control Ragwort. The Local Authority are not responsible for enforcing the control of Ragwort. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) should be contacted for specialist advice.

Ragwort is an important food source for invertebrates. At least 30 species of insects and other invertebrates are totally dependent on Ragwort as their food source. Therefore control should only be undertaken where a threat to grazing animals has been identified. It is not proposed by any organisation that all Ragwort should be removed from all sites.

Control methods

Chemical

Areas of Common Ragwort can be treated with herbicide, however an evaluation of environmental risks is essential wherever herbicides or pesticides are used. This should consider any harmful effects to the environment as well as impacts on animals and plants. It is unlikely that one chemical application will be 100% effective.

As with any chemical control, if there are waterbodies or watercourses that may be affected by run-off from spraying then approval will be needed from the Environment Agency. This will also restrict the type of chemicals that can be used on the site.

Mechanical

Pulling and levering – This can prevent the seed spreading and should provide long-term control, however any fragments of roots not removed can produce weak re-growth. Protective clothing such as sturdy waterproof gloves should be worn when doing this. This method is most appropriate for small areas and the use of machine pulling may need to be considered for larger areas.

Cutting - This should only be used as a last resort to reduce seed production or dispersal where other methods cannot be used. Cutting stimulates growth and plants can re-flower later in the season. Cutting will not kill or weaken the plant.

Disposal

Cut or pulled plants will still pose a risk to grazing animals and should always be removed and disposed appropriately. Material should be disposed of in sealed plastic bags either by incineration or at a local authority approved landfill site.

For further information or general enquiries contact:

Roz Park, Environmental Services Department: 01942 404232
Graham Workman, Wigan Leisure and Cultural Trust: 01942 828906
Environment Agency general enquiry line: 0845 933 3111
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) helpline: 0645 335577
www.defra.gov.uk

Code of Practice on How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort – published by DEFRA 2004

Gillian Bishop
Executive Director Environmental Services
Wigan Council, Civic Buildings
New Market Street, Wigan WN1 1RP

Information in alternative formats

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