

ATTENTION LAND OWNERS AND USERS!

Ragwort is becoming an increasingly common sight around the village – taking two years to fully grow and flower, in the first year of growth ragwort has a dense rosette of leaves low to the ground. Plants in their second year grow to between 30-100cm high and have woody stems and dark green leaves with ragged, irregular edges. They produce bright yellow, densely packed flowers from May to October.

Ragwort can behave like a perennial (flowering every year) if the long stems are cut or mown. Each plant produces thousands of seeds that are dispersed widely by the wind, resulting in the rapid spread of the weed. A single stalk with its multiple flowers can produce 200,000 seeds in one season. They can survive in the soil for up to 16 years awaiting an opportunity to germinate.

Under the Weeds Act 1959, landowners/occupiers must control ragwort within risk areas for grazing or forage production. This means there is a legal obligation to remove ragwort where it's growing on this land or there is a high risk of spread to it. Ragwort control is vital to help reduce the risk of devastating poisoning in grazing livestock.

Common Ragwort contains highly toxic compounds, which can cause poisoning if ingested in any state (and it's even more palatable when wilted or cut, such as accidentally in hay or haylage). Horses are particularly susceptible to ragwort poisoning although other grazing animals are also at risk. These toxic compounds principally damage the liver, which can eventually result in severe disease and potentially death.

So, how can we help control this invasive weed?

Firstly, It is important to note that care must be taken and gloves must be worn when pulling and handling Ragwort as the plant's toxins can be absorbed through the skin or breathed in as pollen grains, which can cause liver problems.

Option 1: Hand Pulling

- Appropriate for smaller areas of land.
- Make sure the whole of the root is removed, as any fragments of the root left within the soil will result in the ragwort re-growing.
- Best results are achieved when the soil is damp.
- Ragwort-specific hand tools are available to help with successful root removal.

Option 2: Herbicide Treatment

- Animals must be moved to alternative grazing before the herbicide is applied to the land.
- Approved products are listed on the Pesticide Safety Directorate at pesticides.gov.uk. **Local agrochemical companies** can also help.
- Some products require a qualified specialist to carry out the application. Details are available from the National Association of Agricultural Contractors at naac.co.uk.**
- The herbicide should be applied when rosette growth is seen in spring.
- Established plants are less susceptible to spraying, particularly when the stem increases in length (normally early June).

•It's only safe to return live stock once all the ragwort has fully disintegrated. This can take a few weeks, so follow the product specific guidelines carefully. Remember that dead ragwort is still toxic and palatable.

Disposal

The safest and most effective method is to dry and burn the material, however do **remember** that dry Ragwort is even more toxic and appealing to livestock, with the bitter taste decreasing as the plant dries !

It is best to dry the material in paper feed bags(plastic bags will merely rot it) burning in a safe manner when completely dry.

Larger amounts can be dried under cover but well away from grazing livestock and then burned accordingly.

For disposal of small amounts of freshly pulled weeds, Cheshire West and Chester Council advise that they will accept them in the green/ garden waste bins.

Antrobus Parish Council