

Ragwort Control



Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) is only a problem plant when in great abundance on grazing land.

Ragwort is a very important plant for invertebrates in the UK. At least 30 insect species (and 14 fungi species) are entirely reliant on Ragwort, and about a third of the insects are scarce or rare. Ragwort is also a critically important nectar source for hundreds of species of butterflies, bees, moths, flies and other invertebrates, helping to maintain what remains of their much declined populations in the UK countryside. In some instances the presence of Ragwort may be the only source of nectar for a Biodiversity Action Plan species. A number of look-alike plants also support rare and endangered species such as the Tansy beetle (*Chrysolina graminis*).

However, when eaten by livestock it causes poisoning over a prolonged period of time. Animals do not become ill or die immediately after ingesting it. It builds up within their bodies causing long term liver damage. Horses appear to be particularly vulnerable, and it can be at its most dangerous when it is incorporated into hay bales by accident and goes unnoticed. However, it is only a problem in the field if the land covered by ragwort is greater than 10% in a grazing area or your golf course is

adjacent to a grazing area. Landowners have a responsibility to control the plant on their land if this is the case. It is worth remembering though Ragwort is a native plant and does have its place in the ecosystem. Bees love it for nectar and it is the food plant of the Cinnabar Moth caterpillar, so do not waste time and money removing ragwort if its ground cover is less than 10%.

The Ragwort Control Bill is implemented through a Code of Practice that provides guidance on how to prevent the spread of Ragwort. The code can be seen at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prevent-the-spread-of-harmful-invasive-and-non-native-plants>

The Code now states that it 'does not propose the eradication of common ragwort but promotes a strategic approach to control the spread of common ragwort where it poses a threat to the health and welfare of grazing animals and the production of feed or forage.'