



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 322 N. Commercial St Bellingham WA 98225  
(360) 778-6234 [www.whatcomcounty.us/914/Weeds](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/914/Weeds)

## TANSY RAGWORT

*Senecio jacobaea*

**THREAT:** A native of Europe, tansy ragwort, or "stinking willie", has long had the reputation of poisoning cattle and horses. Tansy ragwort causes loss of pasture for grazing animals, unthrifty livestock, and death of animals. The entire plant contains varying concentrations of poisonous alkaloids in its parts, which cause irreversible liver damage in wildlife and livestock relative to the amount consumed. Animals will graze the weed in poorly managed pastures or range lands where other forage is limited or overgrazed. Damage is cumulative with time and dose, with consumption of 2% of body weight over a 15 to 30 day period being sufficient to kill a cow. Poisoned animals may become easily agitated, have a loss of appetite, chew on fences and dirt, become weak, and have a staggering gait. Some animals may not die from poisoning, but will remain in poor shape. **This condition is not reversible.** Cattle and horses are more seriously affected than goats and sheep.

**DESCRIPTION:** Tansy ragwort blooms from July through September. The daisy-like yellow flowers produce seeds that are transported by wind, water, and animals. The leaves are deeply cut, giving a ragged appearance. The plant can reach six feet in height. It can be distinguished from other plants by counting the yellow petals on the flowers. There are typically 13 petals per flower on tansy ragwort. In Whatcom County, tansy ragwort is most commonly confused with St. Johnswort and common tansy. St. Johnswort has about five petals on the yellow flowers, while common tansy has no petals (it has a round button-like flower).



**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Animals may avoid eating mature plants if sufficient forage is available. However, this plant often affects animals in the spring when young plants are mixed with the desirable grasses and cannot be avoided as animals forage. Good pasture management is the best long-term solution to tansy ragwort control. Good land management practices prevent the growth and spread of tansy ragwort and continued monitoring is necessary to insure that new plants are removed before seed fall can occur. Poisoning often occurs by feeding livestock contaminated hay. This is also a common way of spreading the weed. The plant spreads by seed, but can also regenerate from root segments left in the soil or if the plant is only cut or broken. Biological agents are available to help control tansy ragwort. Some chemical controls are effective. Contact the Weed Control Board for site-specific control recommendations or visit the Board's website at <http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/930/Noxious-Weed-Fact-Sheets> for the publication: "Control Options for Tansy Ragwort"

