



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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COMMON GROUNDSEL

Senecio vulgaris

THREAT: Common groundsel, a native to Europe, was introduced to North America in 1620 as a medicinal plant. It is now widespread in North America and can quickly invade gardens, roadsides, orchards, agricultural lands and other disturbed areas. Common groundsel produces a large amount of seed and can flower at temperatures below freezing. Plants can produce seed within 5 weeks of germination, making it possible for 4 generations to be produced in a growing season. Additionally, flowers can go to seed after the plant has been killed. Common groundsel plants can be self-pollinating and seeds are dispersed by wind, water, machinery, clothing, and animals. Common groundsel contains an alkaloid that causes cumulative, irreversible liver damage in some livestock, especially horses and cattle. The plant is still toxic when dried and most poisoning occurs from plants consumed in hay. Be sure to examine closely any first year alfalfa hay for the seed heads, which will be small white puffballs.

DESCRIPTION: Common groundsel is a summer or winter annual, possibly a biennial. It has hollow stems and grows 6 to 18 inches tall. The alternate leaves are deeply lobed and can be up to 4 inches long and 1.5 inches wide. It has yellow, tubular, often nodding, flowers borne in clusters at the end of the stalks. Seeds are produced in a small dandelion-like puffball. Common groundsel usually flowers from spring into the fall, but can flower year-round during mild winters. It generally has a small taproot, with small, secondary, fibrous roots. Common groundsel grows best during cool, moist weather.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Common groundsel can be controlled through chemical and mechanical means. Hand pulling or digging is effective for small infestations, as long as most of the root is removed. Shallow tillage will kill plants, although it may encourage germination of seeds in the soil. Some groundsel has developed resistance to certain herbicides. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.