

## **Ragwort**

### **Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group**

Not perhaps the time of year to raise the subject, but the results of a 25 year trial at Silwood Park, conducted by Prof. Michael Crawley, have just been brought to my attention. It seems that all our various attempts to rid ourselves of this pernicious weed have been in error and the way to kill it off is to prevent rabbits entering the affected areas and, basically, let it be. It apparently cannot reseed in well established and maintained sward; needing bare patches, and so it dies. All other methods encourage the plant to change from a bienial into a perenial and, thus, to return to haunt us.

Details of the research can be found at

<http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/pls/portallive/docs/1/587937.PDF>

No more pulling?! - Yippee!!

Tim Beech

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I have some land which when I bought it was yellow with ragwort. Over only 2 years, this has reduced to much more sporadic cover by keeping the cattle grazing to a very low level (Tier 2 ESA) so that the grass is not cropped low and there are few spaces (except for mole hills, cattle foot prints and badger snuffle holes!). There are still young plants though, and these are finding much smaller niches to establish than you can see. So don't be too optimistic. Pulling etc also removes the seed source so the plants have less ability to establish in the gaps we can't see!

Kind regards,  
Penny Anderson

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Folk law round here is that pulling ragwort leaves small roots that then regrow. I suspect there may be something in that and so am spraying with glyphosate and then kink over one stem so you know which you have sprayed - I guess you could add dye to the sprayer if the spirit moved you. As regards keeping rabbits out, dream on !

We have black leopards here but they need to breed a bit faster.- They also eat badgers !

Regards  
RichardM

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Ragwort is accumulative and the animal will appear healthy until the liver can't cope. At which point the animal becomes listless, loses appetite and exhibits yellowing of the eyeballs and skin, at which point the damage is done and the animal usually dies.

Sheep are better able to cope with ragwort poisoning than cattle and in fact the accumulation usually takes so long in sheep that they die of old age or are culled before damage becomes apparent, unless they have been eating ragwort exclusively.

Cattle are more of a problem as some individuals will develop a taste for it and almost seem to become addicted (this is what happens with acorns also). Hence usually they won't touch it, but every now and then one dies from ragwort poisoning.

Both sheep and cattle seem to cope better than horses

Cathy

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Could it be that sheep and cattle are more likely to be culled before the liver has time to be damaged beyond a functioning level? Exmoor ponies for example, average 27 years on the planet. I understand that the liver only needs to be 20% healthy in order to carry on

functioning and still has the capability to recover, until the symptoms appear that is. If the poison is cumulative it must be possible for it to be present in the liver of meat animals before they exhibit any symptoms. Does this mean it could be entering the human food chain? Wonder if there's been any research?

Margaret.

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Ragwort

ref <http://www.provet.co.uk/lorgue/>

#### Toxicity

Contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids including:jacobine, jacobine, jaconine and retrorsine, which are all hepatotoxic. Toxicity is maximal during the first stage of plant growth. Drying does not reduce the toxicity of the plant.

#### Oral doses:

repeated ingestion of approximately 50-100 g fresh plant over a period of 7-8 weeks can result in hepatic lesions in cattle (daily ingestion? website doesnt say);

Lethal Dose (LD 50? website doesnt say) quantity of fresh plant expressed as a percentage of body weight:

horses, cattle 4-8

sheep, goats 200-300

ie sheep and goats far less susceptible

LD50 = The amount of a chemical that is lethal to one-half (50%) of the experimental animals exposed to it. LD50s are usually expressed as the weight of the chemical per unit of body weight (mg/kg). It may be fed (oral LD50), applied to the skin (dermal LD50), or administered in the form of vapors (inhalation LD50).

regards

jim swanson

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