

Ragwort: the requirements

From information supplied by DEFRA



Common ragwort, as a native plant, supports a wide variety of wildlife, and is a major nectar source for many insects. In many situations ragwort poses no threat to horses and other livestock. Other plants, including other types of ragwort, look similar to common ragwort but are protected, or rare, and so it is important to be sure that common ragwort is properly identified before any action is taken.

What to do if ragwort is threatening land you own or manage

Initially, an approach should be made to the occupier or owner of land on which injurious weeds specified in the Weeds Act 1959 (which include common ragwort, *Senecio jacobaea*) are growing. If this does not succeed, contact DEFRA (see box below). If the weeds pose a serious threat to farmland, DEFRA may serve a notice on the occupier of the land requiring him/her to take action to prevent the weeds from spreading. If the notice is not complied with, DEFRA may take action directly.

The enforcement powers under the Weeds Act are discretionary and there is no legal obligation on DEFRA to take action. DEFRA policy is that a priority will only be given to complaints where weeds are threatening land used for:

- keeping or grazing horses and other livestock, **or**
- farmland used to produce conserved forage (e.g. hay or silage), **or**
- other agricultural activities, **and;**
- the complainant has made reasonable efforts to contact the landowner or occupier where the weeds are growing.

Weeds specified in the Weeds Act which threaten land other than farmland

Where there is a serious risk that injurious weeds may spread to land which is not farmland there is no legal remedy under the Weeds Act. The best way forward is for the complainant to discuss the problem with the occupier of the infested land. They may be able to work together to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Ultimately, however, if this is not possible, an occupier of land under threat from weeds may need to consider civil action through the courts.

Complaints about injurious weeds, including ragwort, should be directed to:

Natural England, Burghill Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS10 6NJ

Weeds Helpline: 0117 959 8622

All complaints must be on the official form which can be obtained from the above office or downloaded from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/wildlife/weeds/index.htm>

A code of practice for dealing with ragwort was first published by DEFRA in July 2004 and has been revised since. This can be obtained from DEFRA or downloaded from the same website for free. It includes control advice and a ragwort identification guide.

Ragwort: The IW Council's Position

The Council has no powers to enforce the Weeds Act itself; but the Council as landowner recognises the problem posed by ragwort and does take action against it. The Council aims to comply with the Code of Practice where this is practicable. However the extent of the problem means that there are many places where infestations remain. A high priority is put on areas where grazing is active, such as Brading Down, Nansen Hill and Rew Down, all of which have been the subject of regular ragwort control operations for many years. On Highway rural grass verges, all complaints are risk assessed in accordance with the Code of Practice, and those which are a high risk are dealt with by contractors on a rapid response basis.

The Council is able to give advice on control methods and practices, but will not normally become involved in action against ragwort where it is not growing on or affecting land in which the Council has an interest.

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