

COMMON TANSY

(*Tanacetum vulgare* L.)



COMMON TANSY

State Noxious Weed List: **No.**

Common tansy, also referred to as garden tansy, golden buttons and bitter buttons, is a member of the Asteraceae or sunflower family. Common tansy is native to Europe and first was introduced to the United States as early as the 1600s as an ornamental plant and for medicinal purposes. The plant contains alkaloids that can be toxic to humans and livestock if consumed in large quantities. However, animals rarely ingest common tansy due to the strong smell of the plant. Illnesses in humans have been reported after hand pulling, suggesting toxins may be absorbed through unprotected skin. Common tansy still is used in some medicines and is listed in the United States Pharmacopoeia as a treatment for colds and fever.

Identification and growth form:

Common tansy is an aromatic perennial forb or herb that commonly grows from 1.5 to 6 feet tall. The plant reproduces both by seed and creeping rootstocks. Roots of the plant are fibrous and produce rhizomes. Stems of the plant are purplish-red. Leaves are alternate, smooth to slightly pubescent, 2 to 10 inches long and 1.5 to 3 inches wide, and deeply divided into numerous narrow, toothed segments that appear fernlike. Glandular dots on the leaves of the plant produce the strong, unique odor of the plant. Flowers of the plant are yellow, 0.25 to 0.5 inch across and buttonlike in flat-topped, dense clusters. Each head is composed of mainly yellow disk flowers that are arranged at the stem top in a flat-top cluster in which the outer flowers bloom first. Flowering typically occurs from July to September. Flower heads turn brown and maintain their shape at seed set. Seeds are yellowish brown with short five-toothed crowns.

Common tansy sometimes is confused with tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea* L.). However, tansy ragwort is nonaromatic, has ray flowers and does not have the sharp, toothed leaves found on common tansy.

Why is this plant a concern?

Common tansy is an aggressive plant that can form dense vegetative colonies on disturbed sites and generally is found on roadsides, fence rows, pastures, vacant lands, stream bank, and waste areas. Disturbances can promote the colonization and spread of the plant. Common tansy reduces overall pasture productivity because the plant displaces desirable grasses and forbs and animals are reluctant to graze it. In addition, unpleasant tasting milk may result when dairy cattle graze the leaves of common tansy. Wildlife habitat also is affected negatively by the plant.

How do I control this plant?

Chemical. Herbicides for common tansy control include Escort (metsulfuron) and Telar (chlorsulfuron). Chaparral (aminopyralid plus metsulfuron) works well when infestations of common tansy also include thistle species. Herbicides may be most effective when applied in the spring during early bud development.

Cultural. Hand-pulling or digging may provide control for small infestations of common tansy if the entire root system is removed. However, gloves and protective clothing should be worn to prevent absorption of toxins through the skin. Mowing can reduce seed production if conducted during the bud stage; however, plants are able to regrow from rootstock.

Biological. No biological agents or pathogens are available for this weed.