

# Pest Management – Invasive Plant Control

## Common Tansy

### Conservation Practice Job Sheet

**MN-797**



**Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)**

Brother Alfred Brousseau @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database



**Common Tansy, flowers**

William S. Justice @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

#### Common Tansy

Native to Europe and Asia, tansy was brought to the U.S. by early colonists for culinary, medicinal and ornamental uses. The plants contain alkaloids that are toxic to both humans and livestock if consumed in large quantities. It is rich in volatile oils which were often used as a wash to treat roundworm, rheumatism, fevers and digestive problems. Research found oil distilled from the plants to effectively repel mosquitoes and potato beetles. It was used in Colonial America for packing meat and other perishable goods because of compounds with fungicidal and antibacterial properties. It has also been used for embalming.

#### Ecological Threat

Common tansy is a perennial herb in the sunflower family. It forms dense stands that inhibit the growth of desirable vegetation, resulting in the loss of quality forage, wildlife habitat and native plants. It is undesirable forage and is seldom grazed by livestock. Reforestation efforts can be hindered by tansy outcompeting saplings.

It appears to grow well under varied environmental and climatic conditions. Disturbed sites, road sides,

*Job Sheet –Pest Management (797)*

waste sites, streambanks and pastures are good candidates for invasion.

#### Description

Common tansy is an aromatic and oily perennial that grows from 1 to 6 feet tall. The stems grow in a cluster, causing the plant to have a bush appearance. Small, golden flower heads form many flat-topped clusters at the tops of the plants. Flower heads are button shaped. Leaves alternate on the stem and are deeply divided into numerous narrow, individual leaflets with toothed edges.

The plant is rhizomatous so flowering stems can grow from severed roots. It spreads vegetatively forming new plants from even small root fragments. It also spreads easily by seeds.

#### Control

Prevention of the establishment and spread of infestations is the most cost effective management tool. This can be achieved by limiting disturbance of weed-free lands.

#### Biological Control

There are none at this time.

### **Mechanical or Manual Control**

Pulling or mowing used alone has little effect on tansy, except to reduce seed production. Most of the big roots are near the surface, so it may feel like you can pull up smaller plants, roots and all, but it almost always comes back. Gloves and other protective clothing should be worn to prevent possible absorption of toxins through the skin.

Tansy regenerates from root fragments, so cultivation could expand the size of an infestation.

### **Chemical Control**

Tansy is relatively easy to control with common herbicides like 2,4-D, glyphosate or a blend of 2,4-D and clopyralid (brand name Curtail), or picloram (brand name Tordon 22K<sup>1</sup>). However, the weed patches must be monitored and retreated to kill any tansy that regenerates from roots. Special care must be taken along ditch banks and creeks to avoid contaminating the water. Wipe on applications made between the rosette to early flowering stage give the best results. Metsulfuron (brand name Escort) is also mentioned in some literature as giving effective control.

The most effective control method combines mowing or hand cutting with chemical control and encouraging competition from native vegetation. Preventing seed production and dispersal checks the weed's spread, and repeated stem removal depletes the food energy stored in roots without the risk of producing root pieces that could result in the new plants. Herbicide applied at the correct time ensures chemicals get translocated into the root system where they have the maximum effect.

### **Important Note!**

Mention of specific pesticide products in this document does not constitute an endorsement. These products are mentioned specifically in control literature used to create this document.

By law, herbicides may only be applied as per label instructions. Follow all label instructions when applying pesticides including "grazing and re-entry level restrictions" and application site restrictions (is the product labeled for "the application site" you are considering?).

Most of the products listed are not acutely toxic but have high potentials to move off-site via leaching or

runoff under certain conditions. Off-site movement potential can be minimized by avoiding over-spraying or application to the point where products are reaching or dripping onto the ground.

<sup>1</sup> – Restricted Use Pesticide

### **Information and Recommendations compiled from:**

- LeCain, Ron and Roger Shely; Montana State University Extension, MontGuide, Common tansy.  
<http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt9911.pdf>
- Idaho Forest Service fact sheet, Common tansy.
- Thomas J. Elpel. **Botany in a Day, 4th Edition**. HOPS Press: Pony, MT. January 2000.  
[http://www.wildflowers-and-weeds.com/weedsinfo/Tanacetum\\_vulgare.htm](http://www.wildflowers-and-weeds.com/weedsinfo/Tanacetum_vulgare.htm)
- Alberta Invasive Plants council, fact sheet.  
<http://www.invasiveplants.ab.ca/Downloads/CommonTansy.pdf>