

COMMON GROUNDSEL

Senecio vulgaris L.

Family: Asteraceae (Sunflower).

Other Scientific Names: None.

Other Common Names: Old-man-in-the-spring.

Legal Status: Not categorized.



Identification

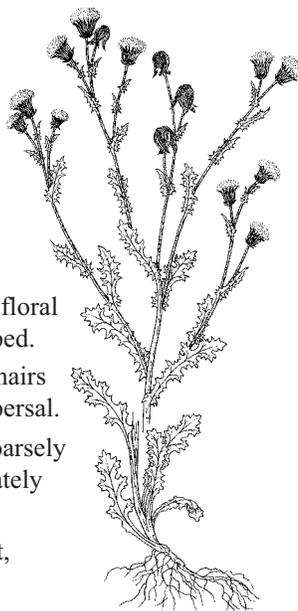
Growth form: Annual, winter annual, or sometimes biennial forb.

Flower: Flower heads are numerous and have yellow disk flowers but no ray flowers. The floral bracts (phyllaries) are black-tipped.

Seeds/Fruit: Seeds have white hairs (pappus) that promote wind dispersal.

Leaves: Leaves are alternate, coarsely and irregularly toothed, or pinnately parted.

Stems: Mature plants have erect, branched stems 0.25–1.4 m tall.



Roots: Small taproot with secondary fibrous root system.

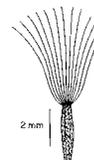
Seedling: Seed leaves (cotyledons) and young leaves are purple below.



Similar Species

Exotics: Woodland groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*) is frequent in coastal and southwestern BC.

Natives: Thirty-two native and introduced species of *Senecio* occur in the province (Douglas et al. 1998).



Impacts

Agricultural: A problematic weed in cultivated crops, gardens, and nurseries. Poisonous to cattle and horses.

Ecological: No information available.

Human: Contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids, which can cause irreversible liver damage and possibly death in humans.

Habitat and Ecology

General requirements: Grows mainly in cultivated soil but may be found in pastures or along roadsides and disturbed areas. It is best adapted to wet environments and nutrient-rich soils.

Distribution: Common in west-central and southwestern BC, but rare elsewhere in the province (Douglas et al. 1998). Present in all agricultural reporting regions but not considered a major concern in any region. It is widely distributed throughout the US.

Historical: Introduced from Europe.

Life cycle: Seeds germinate in late autumn or early

spring. Seedlings appear as tiny rosettes with sharply notched leaves that are purple on the underside. Common groundsel flowers from April through October. Seeds may mature in opened flowers even after the plants have been killed.

Mode of reproduction: By seed.

Seed production: No information available.

Seed bank: No information available.

Dispersal: Seeds are easily dispersed by wind.

Hybridization: No information available.

Management

Biocontrol: None.

Mechanical: In croplands, tillage in autumn and early spring will kill common groundsel seedlings. Small infestations can be pulled and larger infestations can be cut or mowed.

Fire: No information available.

Herbicides: Many infestations have developed resistance to triazine herbicides. Consult the most recent edition of BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Crop Production Guides for specific recommendations. **Before applying herbicides, read the label for full use and precautionary instructions.**

Cultural/Preventive: Common groundsel has a relatively small root system and is easy to hand-pull. Prevent establishment of new infestations by

minimizing disturbance and seed dispersal, eliminating seed production, and maintaining vigorous perennial plant communities.

Integrated Management Summary

Ensure that grazing management maintains vigorous perennial plant communities. Cut, hand-pull, and apply herbicides immediately if this plant invades. Seed disturbed area to provide adequate ground cover to prevent invasion.

References

Douglas, G. W., G. B. Straley, D. Meidinger, and J. Pojar, eds. 1998. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia*. Vol. 1: *Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons (Aceraceae through Asteraceae)*. Province of British Columbia.

Whitson, T. D. (ed.), L. C. Burrill, S. A. Dewey, D. W. Cudney, B. E. Nelson, R. D. Lee, R. Parker. 1996. Common groundsel. *Weeds of the West*. Western Society of Weed Science, in cooperation with the Western United States Land Grant Universities Cooperative Extension Services, Newark, CA.

