

# COMMON TANSY: Options for control

**Common Tansy**, a class-C noxious weed in Lincoln County, Washington (*Tanacetum vulgare*) of the Asteraceae family. It is also known as bitter but-tons, cow bitter, mugwort and golden but-tons. Common tansy is an aromatic perennial forb that reproduces by seed or root-stalks. The leaves are deeply divided into leaf-lets with toothed margins, alternate and are consistent in size, and smell like camphor. The stems are often purplish-red and grow 1 to 6 feet tall. Yellow-orange button-like flower heads that lack long petals (ray flowers) are numerous (20 to 200) in flat-topped, dense clusters on the terminal stem. The yellowish-brown seeds have five-toothed ridges.

Originally from Europe, common tansy was introduced into the United States for its ornamental

and medicinal qualities, and has escaped cultivation. In Early Modern Europe, herbalists used Common tansy oil to induce miscarriages. The tanacetum, the oil in the stem and leaves, can also be fatal to both humans and animals. In Medieval times, people ate young Common tansy leaves during Lent to remind them of the bitter herbs that the Jews ate on Passover. Today, it is used in floral arrangements, as the bright yellow flowers retain their color when dried.

Common tansy is an undesirable forage for livestock. It is generally found along roadsides, waste areas, stream banks, vacant lots, and in pastures throughout most of the U.S. It prefers disturbed places, particularly those with access to water.



Common tansy over-winters as a basal rosette.



Leaves are dark green in color and look like ferns.



Tall upright stems are often purplish red and dotted with glands.

## Key identifying traits

- Perennial with 2 to 6 ft. tall **purplish-red stems** topped with dense clusters of bright yellow flowers.
- Leaf has **distinct smell** not shared by its look-a-like tansy ragwort.
- Alternate **leaves** are **deeply toothed**, look like **ferns**, are **furry** on the underside and **smooth** above.
- **Flower** head has 20-200 button-like disk flowers that do not have petals.
- **Flower** heads turn brown and maintain their shape at seed set.
- **Roots** are fibrous and produce rhizomes.

## Biology and ecology

- Perennial plant reproduces by **seeds** and **root stalks**. Flowering is from July to September.
- A single large plant may produce **150,000 seeds**, which may lie dormant in the soil for as long as **15 years**.
- **Foliage** contains the insecticide pyrethrin, neurotoxin thujone, toxic oil tanacetin, and camphor. **Tainted milk** results when dairy cows eat the **leaves**.
- **Human consumption** of concentrated plant extracts, has resulted in **illness** and **death**.
- **Found** in full sun along stream banks, trails and roadsides, in waste areas and vacant lots and pastures.
- Often **confused** with class B noxious weed tansy ragwort, and groundsel.



Numerous seeds are tufted and dispersed by wind and water.



Flowers are yellow, button-like in flat topped dense clusters, resembling the center of a daisy.



Often found along stream banks, here's a picture of the rust colored winter stalk.

# CONTROL MEASURES:

For this and other publications, see our website at: [www.co.lincoln.wa.us/weedboard](http://www.co.lincoln.wa.us/weedboard)

## Prevention:

- Beware of fill dirt, hay and seed from outside your area. **Early detection** is vital to prevent invasion.

## Biological:

- No known bio control exists at this time.

## Cultural:

Healthy competitive vegetation helps lessen chance of invasion, but doesn't preclude it.

## Mechanical:

- Repeated tillage or digging can be effective, but must be done frequently to wear out rootstocks.
- Hand pulling is only effective where there are

few plants in their first year of growth. Be sure to pull before plants set seed.

- Tansy recovers well from mowing.

## Chemical:

- Metsulfuron (Escort) or Telarat 0.3 oz. per acre.
- Aminopyralid (Milestone) can be used up to the water's edge.
- Spot spraying with 2,4-D to water's edge.
- Dicamba + 2,4-D (Weedmaster) is an effective tool.
- A non-ionic surfactant to help with herbicide uptake.
- **Read the label** instructions before applying.

Common tansy contains alkaloids that are toxic to both humans and livestock, if eaten in large amounts, but animals seldom graze it, because of the strong smell. Gloves are a must when pulling common tansy, as the plant's toxins are absorbed through the skin. Horses and cows will browse tender young leaves, but won't touch bitter mature plants.



Common Tansy is wide spread across the United States.



Once Common tansy escapes from the garden, it invades pastures, meadows, roadsides and stream banks. With adequate moisture, this hostile weed will force out native plants. It threatens the biological structure of natural areas by reducing forage, wildlife habitat, and species diversity.

Photos and references courtesy of: King County Noxious Weed Control; photo, Steve Dewey, Utah State University; Montana State University; Wikipedia; Weeds B.C.

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