

RAGWORT CONTROL

Contractor's Experience

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Before dealing with the chemical control of ragwort, I will endeavour to give you some information on the history and habit of this very dangerous weed.

Ragwort is a biennial or perennial herb, springing from a thick root stock from which is developed numerous fleshy roots. One plant a foot across may have 100 of these roots, but an old plant may have up to 700. These roots have the power of making new plants from small pieces.

One well-grown plant may have more than 2000 flowers with an average of 50 seeds per head. It is possible then for one plant to produce 100,000 seeds per year. The need, therefore, to prevent flowering is evident by these figures.

Ragwort, of course, is poisonous to stock, and was first noticed near Winton in Southland. Hence the disease caused in stock was often called Winton disease.

That is just a brief outline on the type of weed I intend to deal with.

Ragwort like many other succulent plants is susceptible to the hormone-type weedkiller. This being the case, I intend to deal mainly with the method of using the new organic weedkillers to the best advantage.

Therefore one must first consider the stage of growth, the best method of application, and the correct type of hormone to use.

To try to give you a clear picture, I will take each heading separately.

A. Stage of Growth

In plants where translocation is essential, the stage of growth is very important, and in my opinion the correct time to spray is in early spring or late autumn; that is, in the rosette stage before the appearance of the bud.

When considering the stage of growth there are two factors you must remember: 1. It takes approximately 6 weeks for the hormone to kill the plant completely; therefore, work must begin early to avoid flowering; and 2, which is very important, it is an offence against the Noxious Weeds Act to have ragwort flowering on your property.

B. Type of Material

The chemicals that will give you the best results are the ester form of 2,4-D, and the sodium salt of 2,4-D, at 1.35lb. acid equivalent per acre of the ester and 3lb. of sodium salt.

I gave the correct time of application as spring and autumn, so you commence spraying in the wet period of the year. Therefore, I would favour the esters, as rain has little effect on them, whereas the sodium salt, being a water-based material, can be affected by heavy rain shortly after application, but under favourable conditions the results should be very much the same.

I should at this stage clarify the position regarding autumn spraying.

The early spring growth of ragwort is seedling growth from the previous autumn, which develops into a large rosette about September or October and will flower in November or early December. After spraying