

How to identify Fireweed

Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) is easily recognised with its bright yellow daisy flowers. The spindly and branched weed grows 10-50cm tall and its yellow flower has around 13 petals. Fireweed has narrow leaves and the plant can be an annual or biennial. The flower season can be all year, but what makes it so noticeable in Autumn and Winter is that it stands tall and strong in paddocks and on roadsides where the grass has died off during the cold or where heavy grazing by livestock kept the grass close to ground level.



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Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*)



**A weed of roadsides and rundown pasture that
is dangerous to livestock.**

How does it affect livestock

Fireweed is responsible for many cases of poisoning resulting in ill-thrift in livestock. This is because it contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids that are toxic to animals. These chemicals cause liver damage to most livestock. All growth stages and parts of the plant contain toxins.



Contaminated hay or silage can be toxic, as can the fireweed that has dried off in the paddock during summer. Normally livestock avoid fireweed when adequate pasture is available but may eat the weed when the quality of pasture is low. Cattle and horses are most susceptible to liver damage through the toxins. It is less toxic to sheep and goats but can cause liver damage if large quantities are eaten, even over longer periods such as consecutive seasons.

How does Fireweed spread

Heavy infestations of fireweed generally result from two principal causes: **Neglect** of an infestation and **Loss of good ground cover**.

Fireweed can be an annual but many plants survive through summer, plants of all ages can be present at the same time. Seeds germinate and flower in mild, warm conditions around 15-27 C. Most seedlings appear between March and June and grow quickly to flowering in 6-10 wks.



Even light infestations can produce 1 million seeds per hectare. Seeds are windborne, cling to animals, clothing and vehicles and are transported in many feed types or rural products.

How to stop the spread

Fireweed is poisonous and when handling, Gloves are recommended. Fireweed is easily pulled by hand and should be removed whenever it becomes apparent. A Fireweed flower can produce viable seed from an early stage, so place flowering or seeded plants in bags for disposal off property. Try and treat infestations when they are small.

Good land practices defeat fireweed.



Deny fireweed a foothold, ensure any ground cover or pastures are not under stress. Slash and mow regularly not neglecting hard to reach areas. If possible, bag any fireweed in flower or seed and dispose of with your usual rubbish.