

Fireweed

Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) is an environmental weed from South Africa that reduces land productivity and is toxic to livestock. It is spread with ease and is difficult to eradicate, especially if not completely controlled before flowering, allowing it to form a seedbank.

WHAT IS FIREWEED?

Fireweed is an invasive plant that can invade pastures, and it is also poisonous to livestock as it contains chemicals called pyrrolizidine alkaloids. The flower is bright yellow and daisy-like in appearance. Fireweed is a Weed of National Significance, which must not be sold anywhere in NSW.

HOW TO IDENTIFY

Leaves are:

- Bright green;
- Fleshy and narrow;
- 2–7cm long and 3–10mm wide;
- Smooth, toothed or lobed on the edges;
- Stalkless and clasped around the stem;
- Alternate along the stems.



Flowers are:

- Small, yellow and daisy-like with up to 15 petals (typically 13);
- 1–2cm in diameter;
- In clusters at the ends of branches;
- Emerging from a small cup of modified leaves called bracts (usually 21 bracts);
- More abundant on some plants than others, and up to 200 per plant.



Seeds are:

- Small and light;
- 1–3 mm long;
- Cylindrical in shape;
- Downy on the surface;
- Attached to fine, white feathery hairs that aid in dispersal by wind.



Roots are:

- Fibrous;
- 10–20 cm deep;
- Branched from a central taproot.



SIMILAR LOOKING PLANTS

Variable groundsel (*Senecio Pinnatifolius*) is sometimes confused with fireweed. It's a native Australian plant, not considered a weed. Often it grows in places where Fireweed is unlikely to be, such as bushland and undisturbed sites.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Each plant can produce up to 18,000 seeds. Wind spreads the light, hairy seeds. Most seeds fall within 5m of the parent plant, but some can be blown much further. Spreading beyond one kilometre is more likely through human activity. Fireweed is spread:

- In contaminated hay, silage and grain products
- By livestock, birds, and other animals
- By sticking to clothing, vehicles or machinery

Do not bale pastures with Fireweed for silage or hay.



CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

Long term treatment of fireweed needs to consider an integrated management system.



Chemical Control

Chemical control is best applied in late autumn as this controls the peak numbers of seedlings and young plants.



Hand Weeding

Individual plants can be hand pulled. Ensure that the whole root system is removed. Wear gloves to protect skin from the plant's poisons. Bag and dispose of pulled out plants.



Pasture Management

Pasture improvement aims to:

- Out-compete Fireweed
- Cover bare soil
- Correct soil fertility

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Landowners under the Biosecurity Act 2015 have a General Biosecurity Duty (GBD) are expected to, within reason, know about any weeds which may impact their land.

Regional Recommended Measure – CONTAINMENT

This applies to Bylong Valley – Ulan, a core infestation area.

Within core infestation area: Land managers should mitigate the risk of the plant being introduced to their land. Land managers should mitigate spread of the plant from their land. A person should not buy, sell, move, carry or release the plant into the environment. Land managers should reduce the impact of the plant on assets of high economic, environmental and/or social value.

ERADICATION

Eradication applies to the rest of the Mid-Western Regional Council Local Government Area.

Land managers should mitigate the risk of the plant being introduced to their land. Land managers should eradicate the plant from the land and keep the land free of the plant. A person should not deal with the plant, where dealings include but are not limited to buying, selling, growing, moving, carrying or releasing the plant. Notify local control authority if found.

Images: NSW DPI

GET THE FREE WEEDS APP

NSW Department of Primary Industries have developed an app that provides key information to help users reduce the impact of over 320 weeds in NSW, called NSW WeedWise.

Users can search or browse weed names (common or scientific), recognise a weed by its physical description and image gallery, and find out about its impacts, where it occurs, how it spreads and its preferred habitat.

NSW WeedWise is a free smartphone app available through app stores.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit Council's website midwestern.nsw.gov.au, or the NSW DPI website www.dpi.nsw.gov.au and search 'weeds'. Council's Weeds Team are available to assist on 6378 2939 or at weeds.admin@midwestern.nsw.gov.au.

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this fact sheet is general in nature and should not be relied upon as the complete source of information to be considered. This document is not intended as a substitute for consulting relevant legislation or for obtaining appropriate professional advice relevant to your particular circumstances.

References: NSW DPI, NSW WeedWise (Weeds of the South-East); Photos: NSW DPI © State of New South Wales