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## Cressleaf Groundsel and Indiana

In the past mustards were given the reputation of turning fields yellow; however, for the past several years it may be ragworts and groundsel doing all the work (Figure 1). In our various travels throughout the state Bill, Tom and I have been seeing large amounts of cressleaf groundsel. The phone calls we have received also suggest that cressleaf groundsel is a spring occurrence.

*Packera* spp. are members of the Aster family (Asteraceae/Compositae). Many people previously knew them as *Senecio* species, but they are being placed in the *Packera* genus (USDA). In Indiana we generally have cressleaf groundsel (*P. glabella*), a winter annual.

Occasionally I see golden ragwort (*P. aureus*) in Indiana which is a perennial. Other than one being an annual and the later being a perennial, cressleaf groundsel will have a thick hollow stem and golden ragwort will have slender stems.



**Figure 1. A field of cressleaf groundsel.**

Cressleaf groundsel starts as a rosette (Figure 2). The young leaves of cressleaf groundsel can be variable, being lanceolate to deeply lobed. Mature leaves generally have deeply lobed margins and are alternately placed on the stem. Yellow disk like flowers can be seen from April to September (Britton and Brown 1970). In Indiana we usually see the flowers in the early spring. Flowers are 9/16 to 13/16 of an inch in diameter. The seed are in a reddish brown achene. Each achene has a pappus for wind dispersal of seed. Seed heads can look like small dandelion seed heads. Cressleaf groundsel can be told apart from mustards by counting the petals. Mustards have four petals per flower, cressleaf groundsel will have 7 to 12 petal like ray flowers (Figure 3). Common groundsel can be found along roadsides, in pastures, and in wet nutrient rich areas. It grows best in cool wet conditions and will die out in periods of hot and dry conditions, as is often found in an Indiana summer.



**Figure 2. Cressleaf groundsel rosette**

*Packera* spp. species can be toxic to cattle and horses. Cressleaf groundsel, not as toxic as its cousin to the West, tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), can still produce toxic alkaloids. Poisoning is most often a chronic, taking several weeks to show symptoms. *Senecio* (*Packera*) poisoning is called "seneciosis" or "pictou disease" (McCain et.al.). Symptoms in cattle can range from scaly noses, rough coats to listless, and a decreased appetite with digestive problems (diarrhea or constipation). In severe cases, cattle may be jaundiced and/or photosensitive. Calves can develop swollen jaws. Horses can become nervous and have the "sleepy staggers" bumping into objects or becoming entangled in fences. Long term exposure can cause liver damage. To prevent seneciosis learn to identify *Packera* spp. species in the pastures and in hay. Remove contaminated hay and avoid feeding on senecio infested pastures.

For information on the control in soybean and corn fields see the companion article "What Do We Do About the Yellow Fields?" ([www.btny.purdue.edu/weedscience/2006/GroundselControl06.pdf](http://www.btny.purdue.edu/weedscience/2006/GroundselControl06.pdf)). The use of metsulfuron methyl (Cimerron, Ally) has been reported to control of cressleaf groundsel in grass pastures. The use of 2,4-D in the fall or early spring while the plant is still in the rosette stage is a cost effective control method. However, consistency of control begins to drop when cressleaf groundsel begins to bolt.

There has been some research on the use of biological controls. In the case of ragworts, insects have been investigated as possible control mechanisms. Much of the research has focused on the cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) and the ragwort flea beetle (*Longitarsus flavicornis* and *L. jacobaeae*).

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## Reference:

- Britton, N. and A. Brown. 1970. An Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada; Volume 3 (Gentian to Thistle). Dover Publications, Inc., New York. pp 540-544.
- McCain, J.W., R.J. Goetz, T.N. Jordan. Indiana Plants Poisonous to Livestock and Pets. Cooperative Extension Service, Purdue University. WS-9.
- USDA, Plant Data Base. Accessed May 6, 2006. <http://plants.usda.gov>



**Figure 3. Cressleaf groundsel inflorescence**



**Figure 4. Cressleaf groundsel**

Information listed here is based on research and outreach extension programming at Purdue University and elsewhere.

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