

TECHNOTE

FIREWEED CONTROL IN NSW AND SOUTH EASTERN QUEENSLAND

Fireweed (*senecio madagascariensis*) is an introduced plant that quickly invades heavily grazed or neglected pastures.

It's most notable during the months of March through to July in Southern NSW and from August through to January in Northern NSW and South East Queensland.

GROWTH HABIT

Belonging to the daisy family, fireweed is an annual or short-lived perennial that has a bright yellow daisy-like flower producing large numbers of seed.

The seeds themselves are attached to white, silky, parachute-like structures which allow ready dispersal by winds.

ORIGIN AND STATUS

Although native to South-eastern Africa, fireweed has become naturalised along the NSW coast and is now widely regarded as possibly the most serious weed of pastures in these areas. Fireweed has been declared noxious in at least 14 shires. Not only does it out-compete pasture species that provide higher quality feed for stock, it is also responsible for many cases of livestock poisoning and general ill-thrift.

TOXICITY

Fireweed contains toxic compounds called pyrrolizidine alkaloids that can lead to fatal liver damage, especially in cattle and horses. Stock will generally avoid eating fireweed because of its unpalatability but there are occasions when ingestion by stock can occur in sufficient quantities to cause poisoning including:

- Where hungry stock have little other feed available.
- Where fireweed infestation is so severe the stock are not able to avoid the weed when grazing.
- Where an infested paddock is cut for hay or slashed and then grazed.

There is no treatment available to effectively combat fireweed poisoning.

The only way to ensure livestock is not threatened is by reducing the presence of the weed in grazing pastures.

SIX STEPS TO FIREWEED CONTROL

- 1. Act quickly. Be proactive.** Destroy any isolated occurrence of plants in otherwise uninfested areas immediately. Early detection and removal by hand pulling or spot spraying will prevent the need for more costly control measures that will become necessary if the weed is allowed to take hold.
- 2. Ensure establishment of new pastures.** When sowing a new pasture, ensuring excellent establishment is of utmost importance, as otherwise fireweed can get a firm hold. Herbicide application may be necessary once the pasture species have reached a safe crop stage to remove early competition.
- 3. Deter germination.** Maintain a dense sward of pasture during the most favourable time for germination of the weed. By sowing winter-active pasture species and not allowing overgrazing toward the end of summer, pasture species may crowd out the fireweed.
- 4. Beware of over-cultivating.** Cultivation can be effective although over-cultivation can be damaging, with the likelihood that herbicide application will be required to control the fireweed that will germinate with the new pasture.
- 5. Slash or mulch in spring.** Slashing or mulching in spring can provide short term control by setting back the fireweed and preventing seed set, however experience has shown that the 'pruned' plant will then reshoot and become harder to control via other means. The weed becomes quite woody and more tolerant to otherwise effective herbicides.
- 6. Monitor regularly.** Regular monitoring of paddocks to check for the presence of fireweed allows early detection. By catching the weed at the seedling stage, a lower rate of herbicide may be used. Effective weed control can still be ensured even when spraying is delayed until as late as the early flowering stage.



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CHEMICAL CONTROL

Trials have shown that the most effective herbicide control is achieved using Nufarm Bromicide 200 at 1.4 L/ha when the weed is at the seedling stage. The higher rate of 2.8 L/ha gives excellent control on all stages of the plant up to early flowering.

Nufarm Bentley and T-Rex will also provide useful control if being applied to target other weeds.

TOP TIP

Spraying during autumn and winter when the weeds are young and actively growing is generally best, however fireweed may be present at any time of the year and spraying should then be used for control when the crop and weed species are at the correct stage.

FIREWEED CONTROL IN PASTURES AND NON-AGRICULTURAL AREAS

HERBICIDE	USE SITUATION	RATE AND FIREWEED SIZE	REGISTRATION STATUS	WHP	COMMENTS
Bromicide® 200 200 g/L bromoxynil as the N-octanoyl ester	Pastures	1.4 L/ha (seedling control) 2.8 L/ha (early flowering)	Registered	56 days	Apply with low volume boom spray during autumn/winter, when weeds are young and actively growing. Not effective on mature plants. Do not apply when rain is expected within 3 hours. Do not spray when temperature is above 20°C or if this temperature may follow for several days after spraying as leaf scorching of clovers and lucerne will occur.
Bentley™ 250 g/L bromoxynil and 25 g/L diflufenican	Pasture. Clover and/or lucerne based pasture (newly sown or established).	0.5 L/ha (up to 4 leaf stage)	Registered	14 days	Spray during autumn/winter when weeds are young and actively growing. Optimum results will be obtained if good soil moisture exists at and after application.
T-Rex® 25 g/L diflufenican and 250 g/L MCPA present as ethyl hexyl ester	Pasture. Newly sown and established clover based pasture, clover for hay and seed production.	1.0 L/ha (up to 4 leaf stage)	Registered	7 days	Spray during autumn/winter when weeds are young and actively growing. Optimum results will be obtained if good soil moisture exists at and after application.

Refer to the APVMA website for current permits.

This technote does not replace the directions for use in the products listed above. The full product label should always be consulted prior to applying any product.

For more information, visit nufarm.com.au



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