

Senecio madagascariensis

Common name:

Fireweed, Variable groundsel,

Palatability:

High at flowering.

Toxicity to Goats:

Low risk.

Toxicity to Other Species:

Toxic to horses, pigs, cattle and sheep.

Poisonous Principle:

Pyrrolizidine alkaloids.

Effects:

Signs and symptoms;

- . Chronic weight loss,
- . Acute jaundice, lethargy, poor muscle coordination and twitching.
- . Maybe photosensitization.

Health and Production Problems;

- . Eating an excess of this plant may lead to chronic liver damage.
- . Reduced long term productivity.
- . Damaged livers in some ruminants may accumulate excess copper, which can kill the animal.

Treatment;

- . None.

Integrated Control Strategy:

- . Goats preferentially eat fireweed, especially the flowers.
- . Slash to prevent flowering.
- . Use herbicides, (Group C), glyphosates or Brominil®.

Comments:

- . An annual or short-lived perennial, with a shallow, branched taproot, variable growth habit and leaf structure, bright-green, standing out in dry pasture.

- . Leaves are elongated, dark green, and variable in shape, with entire, serrated or lobed margins, 2 – 6 cms long or more.
- . Produces clusters of yellow, daisy flowers, 3-5 cms across, with 13 petals, from April to September.
- . Seeds are narrow, cylindrical, small and light, with tufts of white silky bristles at one end. The plant has an enormous seeding capacity.
- . Grows in cool seasons and flowers in spring, and can become prolific after a run of dry summers and wet winters, or after overgrazing.
- . Most cases of poisoning have occurred in cattle, (and horses), sheep seem to be more resistant, and goats even more so.
- . Under normal conditions, fireweed does not seem to be very palatable to livestock, but goats will seek it out. Specific bacteria in the goat's rumen enable them to cope with a higher intake of fireweed, if alternate fodder is available.



Picture: *Senecio madagascariensis*
Helen Simmonds. Calga NSW.

Further Reading:

- . Agdex 642. NSW Dept Ag.
- . Dowling and McKenzie. Poisonous Plants. 1993
- . Henry, Hall, Jordan, Milson, Scheffe & Silcock. Pasture Plants of Southern Inland Queensland. 1995
- . Kohnke. Feeding and Nutrition of Horses. 1998
- . Simmonds, Holst and Bourke. Palatability and Potential Toxicity of Australian Weeds to Goats. 2000