

FIREWEED

(Senecio madagascariensis)

Why is fireweed a weed?

- ♦ Highly invasive in grazed pasture where there is bare soil present for seedlings to become established
- ♦ Invades native grassland, woodland, forest and road verges
- ♦ Toxic to stock, causing progressive liver damage (the plant becomes more toxic when flowering and seeding)
- ♦ Not readily grazed (except by sheep and goats which tolerate toxins better than other stock)
- ♦ Each plant can produce thousands of seeds that are light enough to be carried great distances on the wind, accelerating its spread, and density in pasture can become very high, greatly reducing carrying capacity
- ♦ It is beginning to invade the Southern Tablelands from the south coast where it is well established in pockets and is continually expanding its range, south from the Sydney and Illawarra areas and north from Bega Valley
- ♦ Frost tolerant and can grow through the winter

Description

Plant: low branching annual herb

Leaves: 2-6 cm long, occasionally 8-10 cm on older, vigorous plants. Bright green, thin, slightly fleshy, toothed or smooth-edged, hairless, alternate on stem

Seeds: very fine, 'dandelion' style seed heads. Usually seeds during spring

Flowers: 13-petalled yellow daisy flowers held on slender stems in branched terminal open clusters from April to September. Before opening, the flowers are enclosed by a single row of green bracts (a ring or crowd of modified leaves, usually smaller than a true leaf) which have a darkened tip (see photo below). The bracts are easiest to count just before the flower opens out to reveal the 'petals', when the bract tips are all clustered at the top of the 'bud', or after the seed has been shed when the bracts remain behind. Typically fireweed has about 21 bracts, which helps to distinguish this species from similar native daisies in the genus Senecio.

Dispersal via

- ♦ Seeds carried on wind
- ♦ Possibly moved around in soil and on vehicles
- ♦ In fodder and with movement of livestock

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: fireweed.

Note the difference in fireweed numbers between the densely grassed road verge in the foreground and the grazed paddock over the fence.

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: fireweed
Note the 13 'petals'

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: fireweed
Note the 'dandelion' style seed heads

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: fireweed bracts with brown tips
(usually 21 bracts). A useful ID feature.



Fact sheets are available from the Molonglo Catchment Group website. Visit www.molonglocatchment.com.au or call 6128 3376 for more information about getting involved in your living environment.

Information used to compile this fact sheet was kindly provided by the Southern Tablelands and South Coast Noxious Plants Committee: www.southeastweeds.org.au