

Common Tansy



Tansy is a flowering herbaceous plant with finely divided compound leaves and yellow, button-like flowers. It has a stout, somewhat reddish, erect stem, usually smooth, 50–150 cm tall, and branching near the top. The leaves are alternate, 10–15 cm long and are pinnately lobed, divided almost to the center into about seven pairs of segments, or lobes, which are again divided into smaller lobes having saw-toothed edges, giving the leaf a somewhat fernlike appearance. The roundish, flat-topped, button-like, yellow flower heads are produced in terminal clusters from mid-to-late summer. The scent is similar to that of camphor with hints of rosemary. The leaves and flowers are toxic if consumed in large quantities; the volatile oil contains toxic compounds including thujone, which can cause convulsions and liver and brain damage. Some insects, notably the tansy beetle *Chrysolina graminis*, have evolved resistance to the toxins and subsist almost exclusively on the plant.



Toxicity: The plants contain alkaloids that are toxic to both humans and livestock if consumed in large quantities. Cases of livestock poisoning are rare, though, because tansy is unpalatable to grazing animals. Human consumption of common tansy has been practiced for centuries with few ill effects, yet the toxic properties of the plants are cumulative and long term consumption of large quantities has caused convulsions and even death. In addition, hand pulling of common tansy has been reported to cause illness, suggesting toxins may be absorbed through unprotected skin.



Control Methods:

Grazing: Tansy is distasteful and even toxic to some grazing animals, however, one source claims that sheep will graze it and are not affected.

Chemical: Spot-spraying with selective broadleaf herbicides can be effective.

Mechanical: There has been limited research on control of common tansy. As with all weeds, prevention of the establishment and spread of infestations is the most cost effective management tool. Mowing or hand pulling provide alternatives to herbicide use near waterways and have been reported to marginally control common tansy. Mowing during the bud stage will prevent the growth of flowering stalks, limiting seed production and the spread of infestations by seed. If mowing is used, mower blades should be set high to limit impacts on desirable species. Hand pulling should provide similar results, but gloves and other protective clothing should be worn to prevent possible absorption of toxins through skin.

Tansy was introduced as an ornamental but has shown tendencies as invasive. There are scattered infestations throughout Johnson County primarily along roadsides.