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Noxious Weed - Common Tansy

Common tansy was added to the State Noxious Weed List on March 10, 2010. It was listed as a Prohibited Noxious Weed and added to the Control List – “Prohibited noxious weeds that are listed to be controlled are plants that are established throughout Minnesota or regions of the state. Species on this list must be controlled, meaning efforts must be made to destroy all propagating parts and prevent seed maturation and dispersal, thereby reducing established populations and preventing reproduction and spread as required by Minnesota Statutes, Section 18.78. Additionally, transportation without a permit, propagation, or sale of these plants is prohibited.”

The northern part of Todd County has been identified as recently being infested with common tansy. Common tansy is currently not wide-spread in Todd County, but because it is so difficult to control we would like to try and prevent it from spreading further.

Since most people don't know anything about common tansy, I am providing some information about the plant, its dangers, and ideas on ways to control it.

Common tansy has small button-like yellow flowers in clusters at the ends of stems. It grows from 3 – 6 feet in height and flowers from approximately July through September. The leaves resemble ferns. At the end of the growing season the plant and the flowers turn brown (senesce). Almost all other weeds on the Noxious Weed List start flowering in June. The best time to apply herbicides for common tansy is late June early July when it is in the early bud stage before it flowers. Because they flower later than other plants you will need to identify the plant by its leaves or look for the previous year's dried plants and seed heads.

Common tansy is a highly invasive plant that can severely reduce pasture capacity and desirable forage. It is unpalatable forage for livestock and livestock poisonings are rare, but because of how invasive this plant is, it can over run pastures and leave livestock very little else to eat. Sheep and goats, unlike other livestock, have no ill effects from eating common tansy and will enthusiastically eat the weed to the ground and hardly touch the grass. Sheep and goats can be used for control of tansy. They do, however, need to be retrained to eat tansy after eating hay all winter.

Common tansy can degrade wildlife habitat. The plant has a strong scent and is listed on gardenguides.com as a plant to repel deer. The website says, the plants strong scent can deter deer browsing, and even repel deer from other nearby edible plants by confusing the deer's food-tracking noses. If property is used for deer hunting, common tansy may make it undesirable to deer.

The plant produces alkaloids (neurotoxins and cardiotoxins) that are toxic to humans and livestock if consumed in large quantities. Common tansy has been used for medicinal purposes; human consumption has been practiced for centuries with few ill effects, but the toxic properties of the plants are cumulative.

Long-term consumption of large quantities has caused convulsions and even death. Hand pulling of this plant has been reported to cause illness, suggesting toxins may be absorbed through unprotected skin. I recommend educating children about this plant and discouraging them from touching the plant.

There are several control and management methods for common tansy, but it will take a commitment of several years of consistent efforts to decrease the plant population and keep it from becoming a serious problem.

- Small patches of common tansy can be hand-pulled or dug up. **Gloves and protective clothing should be worn to prevent absorption of toxins through the skin.**
 - If there are no flowers or seeds present on the plant, the plant can be pulled and left on the land.
 - If flowers and seeds are present on the plant, pull the weed, being careful to avoid seeds falling off the plant, place the plant in a plastic bag and secure tightly. Dispose of in trash taken to a commercial disposal facility, or burn (avoid inhaling smoke).

- Mowing is not very effective control, but can be useful in preventing plants from seeding until a better management plan is implemented.
 - Mow before flowering. Repeated mowing during the growing season is required to keep common tansy from re-sprouting and producing seeds. Mowing will not eliminate common tansy and can actually increase its density.
 - Mowing can be beneficial when done several weeks before herbicide application, which increases herbicide contact with re-sprouting foliage.

- Herbicide application has been successful against common tansy. Please follow all label directions, or hire a state certified herbicide applicator to perform chemical applications. Do not cut sprayed plants for at least 2 weeks after herbicide application to allow for chemical translocation to the roots.
 - Application during the late bud stage (late June and early July) has shown good overall management results. Follow up treatments in fall or the following spring may be necessary to kill new seedlings or surviving plants.
 - Becker County has been experimenting with various chemicals and have good results with the following chemicals:
 - 1 oz/acre Escort (Metsulfuron) + Surfactant,
 - 5 oz/acre Milestone (Aminopyralid) + 1 oz/acre Escort (Metsulfuron) + Surfactant,
 - .5 oz/acre Telar (Chlorsulfuron) + .5 oz/acre Escort (Metsulfuron) + Surfactant,
 - 3 oz/acre Opensight or Chaparral + Surfactant,There is now a generic available for Escort.

