

# Molonglo Catchment Group Weed Fact Sheet

## FIREWEED

(*Senecio madagascariensis*)

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.



Weed: fireweed

Note the 13 'petals'



Weed: fireweed

Note the 'dandelion' style seed heads

### 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-petaled 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*.



Weed: fireweed bracts with brown tips

(usually 21 bracts). A useful ID feature.

### Dispersal via

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

## Status

Fireweed is listed as a class 4 noxious weed in both the Palerang Council and Cooma-Monaro Shire Council. The growth and spread of the plant must be controlled in accordance with local management plans published by each local council. It is suggested that fireweed should be dealt with in a similar manner if discovered in the Queanbeyan City Council jurisdiction.

In the ACT, fireweed is a class 1 Notifiable Pest Plant whose presence must be notified to the Chief Executive of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services.

As fireweed is a new and emerging weed in this region control authorities are trying to monitor infestations. Please notify your local control authority if you find fireweed in the Molonglo Catchment.

## Look-alikes

Native plants can often be confused with weed species. The following information aims to assist you with accurate identification to prevent the loss of our declining natives. If you are unsure what species you are dealing with, take advantage of the identification services on offer from your local weeds officer (either at your local council or the ACT's Parks, Conservation and Lands) before carrying out any controls.

There are a number of other similar plants, some of which are natives and should not be removed and some of which are also weeds. It can be very difficult to tell apart - use the 13 petals as a distinguishing feature. Similar weedy yellow daisies usually consist of a single rosette and flower stalk, whereas most similar natives (like the native fireweed) have branched terminal clusters.

The **native fireweed** species grows in grassy forest along the eastern edge of the Monaro. It has a weak trailing growth habit and more deeply toothed leaves. It should not be removed.



Native: native fireweed (*Senecio lautus* ssp *lanceolatus*)

The native **fireweed groundsel** (*Senecio linearifolius*), a robust species to over a metre in height, grows as a cluster of stiff stems. It can behave in a weedy way around edges of farming areas where it colonises after fire or other disturbance. Petals are shorter and fewer (8 or less) than in fireweed, leaves are much larger, with conspicuous veins on the upper surface and finely and regularly toothed margins that are slightly rolled under. This difference in the leaves is apparent in the seedlings as well. If in doubt, get a specimen professionally identified.



Native: fireweed groundsel



Native: fireweed groundsel

## Control methods

For advice on what time of year to implement the following management options, see the Molonglo Catchment Weed Control Calendar.

Prevention is the best control option. Do not buy hay from fireweed affected areas. Search your property regularly for new weed infestations. Pull out isolated plants by hand, take care to remove the roots. Burn the removed plants to avoid the production of viable seeds and propagate from cut or broken stems in contact with the soil. Consult the Rural Fire Service for permits and advice before using fire as part of your management methods; in urban areas also contact the local council/control authority - your local weeds officer can assist with the safe disposal of fireweed plants. Spot spray before flowering. Seek advice on chemical application from your Council Weeds Officer or local 'bush friendly' nursery. Always use chemicals as directed on the label. After removal check for any new infestations every month and maintain control.

Grazing should be controlled to avoid opening up bare ground. Sheep and goats can assist in control if infestations become established (however prolonged grazing of the weed may not be advisable for stock due to the toxins contained in the plant). Goats can also cause significant damage to any native vegetation present and require good fencing to prevent escape.