

Ambrosia trifida

[Synonyms : *Ambrosia trifida integrifolia*]

GIANT RAGWEED.is an annual. Native to North America it has tiny, insignificant fragrant greenish-yellow flowers with many yellow stamens.

It is also known as *Ambrosie trojklaná* (Czech), Bitterweed, Bloodweed, Buffalo-weed, *Dreilappiges Traubenkraut* (German), Great ragweed, *Hästambrosia* (Swedish), Hayfever weed, Horsecane, Horse weed, King-head, Richweed, Tall ambrosia, Tall ragweed, and Wild hemp.

The whole plant has a pleasant smell, especially the fragrant leaves. The flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Warning – the pollen is spread by the wind and can be a significant cause of hay fever. (Apparently the only factor that could prevent giant ragweed releasing its pollen is very high humidity.) If eaten by cows the plant can make milk smell unpleasant and taste bitter.

Trifida means ‘three-cleft, three-lobed or cut in three’ with reference to the leaves.

Records show that the Meskwaki Indians chewed the root to calm any haunting fears during the hours of darkness.

Among some of the North American Indian tribes giant ragweed provided medicine. The Cherokee used its leaves (as also those of close relatives) to neutralize insect stings and a leaf infusion was used to treat pneumonia and fever. For the Iroquois tribe the plant was another source of medicine used to treat diarrhoea.

Archaeologists have found seeds four to five times bigger than those in the wild today. Authorities have deduced from this that near the prehistoric sites in question giant ragweed plants were being cultivated by selection. It is also interesting to note that recent research has shown how the number of male flowers produced by giant ragweed decreases as the number of hours of daylight experienced are reduced.

Some authorities report that locally the root used to be viewed as a sure-fire remedy for nightmares if it was chewed before sleeping.

The crushed flower heads yield a red colouring matter.

Today giant ragweed appears to have few friends. Hay fever sufferers dislike it and farmers uproot it when it is found growing in their fields and drainage areas.

It is fascinating to learn that the copious pollen is actually harvested commercially for pharmaceutical companies to produce preparations for those allergic to the plant.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used the plant as an antiseptic and an agent for controlling pain.