

Senecio elegans

[Synonyms : *Senecio jacobaea*, *Senecio pseudo-elegans*]

RAGWORT is an annual to perennial. Native to South Africa it has daisy-like golden yellow flowers.

It is also known as Agreen, Beaweed, Bennel, Benweed, Bindweed, Boliaum, *Buadhghallan* (Irish Gaelic), Bouin, Bowen, Bowlocks, Bundweed, Cankerweed, Cankerwort, Cheedle-dock, Common ragwort, Cradle dock, Crowfoot, *Creulys Iago* (Welsh), Curly doddies, Devildums, Dog stalk, Dog standard, Dog standers, Ellshinders, *Entaillies* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Erba chitarra* (Italian), European ragwort, Fairies' horse, Fellow-weed, Felon weed, Fireweed, Fizz-gigg, Flea-nit, Flea-nut, Flydod, *Giacobea* (Italian), Gipsy, Groundsel, Grundswathe, Grunsel, *Herbe de St. Jacques* (French), Horseweed, Jacobea (English, Italian), *Jacobée* (French), Jacoby, Jacoby fleawort, *Jakob's Greiskraut* (German), *Jakobskraut* (German), *Jakobskreuzkraut* (German), James' weed, James' wort, Keddle, Kedlock, Keedle-dock, Kettle dock, *Kreuzkraut* (German), Life seed, Mare-fart, *Mèque* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Muggert, Purple groundsel, Ragged Jack, Ragged robin, Ragweed, Redpurple ragwort, St. James' weed, St. James' wort, Saracen's compass, Saracen's consound, Scattledock, Scrape-clean, Seed-of-life, Seggrums, Seggy, *Senecione di San Giacomo* (Italian), *Séneçon jacobé* (French), Sleepy dose, Staggerweed, Staggerwort, Stammerwort, *Stånds* (Swedish), Starwort, Staverwort, Stinking Alexanders, Stinking Alisander, Stinking Billy, Stinking Davies, Stinking nanny, Stinking weed, Stinking Willie, Summer farewell, Tansy, Tansy butterweed, Tansy ragwort, Weebo, Wild cineraria, Yackyar, Yallers, Yarkrod, Yellow boy, Yellow daisy, Yellow top, Yellow weed, and *Zuzón* (Spanish).

Ragwort is very attractive to butterflies.

Warning – ragwort should not be used domestically (either internally, or externally on broken skin) as the whole plant is poisonous. Its symptoms can be delayed and can include jaundice, poor appetite and constipation. It can cause severe liver damage (including cancer) and death. No cases of poisoning have been officially recorded in Britain.

Ragwort can be poisonous for animals and poultry which normally avoid it.

Elegans is Latin (choice, fine, neat) meaning 'elegant'.

It has also been called *Senecio jacobaea* and the *jacobaea* refers to St. James (died 44) who was a patron saint of horsemen and riders. Some authorities believe that the name Ragwort is a corruption of the expressive German name (implying aphrodisiacal qualities) used for some of the plants in the orchid family *Ragwurz*. Some other common names can be accounted for by the plant's use in the past in veterinary medicine for treating staggers (a disease of the brain and spinal cord which causes dizziness) and also its use on castrated bulls (once called seggs or staggs).

The superstitious in Britain once believed that witches rode ragwort like a horse or a broomstick, and in Ireland it was said that leprechauns buried their treasure under the plant. If you could catch sight of him as he reached for it, he would have to show you where you could dig it up.

A yellow wool dye can be obtained from the flowers and a green dye from the leaves.

After its introduction to the North American Continent the Makah Indians absorbed it into their medicinal repertoire and used the plant in infusion.

Ragwort is considered to be an invasive and noxious intruder where it has been introduced both in North America (particularly in the State of Oregon) and in Australia.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend ragwort for treating catarrh, colds, tonsillitis and sore throats. Externally it was used for easing rheumatism, gout, sciatica and painful joints, and for healing bruises, wounds, bee stings, burns, sores, ulcers and eye inflammation. Today it is used occasionally in lotion or ointment form as an external treatment for rheumatic pain and other similar problems, as well as in homoeopathic treatments.