

Common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)

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Introduction Common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) is a perennial forb in the Asteraceae family. It was intentionally introduced to North America for medicinal uses by early European colonists. Despite its long history of use, it can be a problem in pastures and along roadsides, fence lines, ditches, and stream banks.

History and Distribution Common tansy has one of the most interesting histories of any of Montana's noxious weeds. The first records of common tansy cultivation are from the ancient Greeks who used it for a variety of ailments. Swiss Benedictine monks used common tansy as a treatment for intestinal worms, rheumatism, fevers and digestive problems. It's been used as an insect repellent from the Middle Ages to modern times. Due to its preservative properties, common tansy was used in colonial America for packing meat and other perishable goods (see "Story from the Field" below for a good Halloween tale). By the 1800s common tansy had escaped cultivation and could be found growing throughout the northeastern U.S. In 1912 it was reported as far west as Kansas, and it was first found in Montana in 1931.



Identification and Biology Common tansy has flat-topped clusters of small, button-like, bright yellow flowers that blossom in late summer. Pinnately compound leaves are feathery and fern-like and dotted with glands. Stems of common tansy may be reddish in color, and plants typically grow three to four feet tall. Common tansy is rhizomatous, occurring in dense clumps. Roots mainly grow within the top two feet of soil, which is relatively shallow, and may contribute to common tansy being competitive for water and nutrients. Its strong menthol or camphor-like scent can also help with identification.



Management Preventing spread and promoting desired vegetation are helpful tactics for limiting common tansy. Mowing or hand pulling are marginally effective. Mowing during flower bud stage will limit seed production and reduce the risk of spread. Herbicides for common tansy include those containing the active ingredient metsulfuron (e.g., Escort® XP) or chlorsulfuron (e.g., Telar® XP). A high quality, non-ionic surfactant should be used to help the herbicide penetrate plant tissue. There are no biological control agents for common tansy. Targeted grazing is not often used due to palatability issues, and alkaloids in plant tissues that are toxic if consumed in large quantities.

(Halloween) Story from the Field The genus *Tanacetum* is derived from the Greek word *athanotos* which means "without death" or immortal. Common tansy was frequently used for funeral shrouds and wreaths in early America. In 1668 the first president of Harvard University was buried wearing a common tansy wreath in a common tansy lined coffin. When his grave was moved after 200 years, the tansy wreath still retained its color and scent.

For more information on common tansy, read the [MSU Extension MontGuide Common Tansy](#).