



MASTER GARDENER

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Year Round Gardening

Ragweed, A Nuisance You Don't Need.

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At least two ragweed species are native to Colorado, giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*) and common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*). These plants are likely to be found in ditches and roadsides and disturbed, but unplanted areas.



In addition to being unsightly and somewhat aggressive weeds, the pollen of ragweed can be problematic for sensitive individuals. According to Dr. Eric Caplan at Colorado ENT & Allergy “Ragweed pollen counts are detectable starting about August 15, and can remain high up until the second hard frost, generally in late autumn. Ragweed allergy symptoms can include wheezing, sneezing, watery eyes and nasal congestion. If

you think you may suffer from a ragweed allergy consult an allergist. You can be tested for pollen sensitivity.”

Pollen is a fine to coarse powdery substance which is the male fertilizing agent of flowering plants, trees and grasses. Pollen, in some cases, must be carried from one plant to another to accomplish seed production (cross pollination), other plants are self-pollinating. Some pollen is carried by insects or animals, others are carried by wind. Ragweed pollen is carried by wind.

Common ragweed has blue grey foliage which is covered with fine hairs. The leaves are divided (pinnate). Perhaps the easiest identifier is the flowers which occur on the ends of the stems in clusters. These flowers seem to just stay green, unless you look very

closely and you will see a large number of very tiny yellow flowers. This plant can grow up to 4' in height.

Giant ragweed leaves are divided usually into 3 lobes (palmate), although 5 lobed and unlobed leaves can be found on the same plant. The leaves are rough. The flowers are similar, being clustered at the branch ends, very small and inconspicuous. This plant can reach up to 10' in height.



Photos courtesy of Fredricka Bogardus

Both species are prodigious seed producers, a plant can produce up to 62,000 seeds per season. The seeds remain viable in the soil for several years

Control of ragweed can be done mechanically. Mowing before seed formation can exhaust the plants resources and prevent flowering. Ragweed is an annual plant, reproducing from seed each year. In spring the root systems are not well developed, so they are easy to pull. If the plants are larger, and difficult to pull, cut off the flower heads as soon as you notice them, to prevent seed formation. The plant you leave behind will die in winter and you will have minimized the seeding for next year. Be sure to discard the flower and seed heads.

There are chemical controls available, but ragweed is resistant to several herbicides. If you have a large infestation that cannot be controlled with mechanical means, consult the county weed or agriculture agent for further guidance.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. The Help Desk is open at 17 N. Spruce St. Hours are 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. Call 520-7684 or email CSUmq2@elpasoco.com.