

## Weed of the Week – May 26

### Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*)

### Early Season Zero-tolerance Warning

Common ragweed is a **health hazard to those with allergies and asthma**, and it is very common in our gardens. It was very poorly controlled on many garden plots last year, with massive flowering plants over a meter tall being ignored by several of our gardeners. As a result, massive seed distribution has made it one of our most common early weeds this year.

Because the pollen can cause misery for hay fever sufferers, and medical emergencies for asthmatics, we will be taking a hard line on this species this year. Gardeners who have a lot of ragweed present in early summer will receive an email and a posted warning on their plot. Those who allow ragweed to reach the flower-bud stage will receive a second warning to remove it within the week. If it is not removed, it will be mowed or cut, even at the expense of crops that may be among the weeds. In a community garden, we must keep the space usable for the entire membership.

Obviously, nobody wants to be either the enforcer of this rule, nor the recipient, so the best thing is to get rid of ragweed while it is still young and easy to destroy.



Ragweed seedlings are fairly distinctive (photo left). They have paired leaves with many very elongated, rounded lobes. Each new pair of leaves lies at right angles to the previous pair.

The seedlings have small and weak roots. They can easily be hand-pulled. An hour of careful weeding in late May or early June can take care of the bulk of the problem, though some seeds will germinate later, so the battle is never completely won. The reservoir of seed in the soil is typically huge, so disturbance, such as tilling may result in additional seedlings.

On unplanted areas or between rows, seedlings can simply be chopped off with a hoe. The roots cannot generate new growth the way dandelions and garlic mustard can. Some people prefer to use a Dutch hoe for this sort of weeding, rather than a chop hoe. It slides under the surface and cuts off weeds at the root, without bringing new seeds to the surface. Seeds require light to germinate, so this reduces the second crop. Deep mulches or horticultural cloth can significantly reduce recolonization (but be careful, because these can encourage slugs.)

Once ragweed is established, removing it is more difficult, as it develops a fairly tough, fibrous root. The key is to reduce the number of such plants through early control. Even the most conscientious gardener will still get surprises, finding mature plant `hiding in plain sight`. This page will feature ragweed again in early summer, with tips on how to recognise it and eliminate it at the pre-flowering and flowering stage.

This unpleasant intruder does require a little elbow grease, but fortunately it is an annual. Controlling it for one year greatly reduces the seed bank in the soil, as long as everyone does their part.