

## WOOLY GROUNDSEL

*Packera cana* W.A. Weber & Á.

Löve

Plant Symbol = PACA15

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Aberdeen Plant Materials Center



Woolly groundsel. Photo from Wildaboutflowers.com.

### Alternate Names

*Senecio cana*, *S. convallium*, *S. halii*, *S. harbourii*, *S. howellii*, *S. purshianus*

Gray ragwort, Silvery ragwort, woolly ragwort, woolly butterweed

### Uses

Woolly groundsel has value as a food source for insects. *Nymphalis* and *Pontia* butterflies have been observed foraging nectar from woolly groundsel (Ezzeddine and Matter 2008).

Woolly groundsel is browsed by pronghorn antelope (Kessler et al 1981). It is rated as having medium palatability for sheep and low to medium palatability for cattle and horses (Hermann 1966). However it is considered to have moderate levels of toxicity and may be harmful in sufficient quantities (USDA NRCS 2012).

### Status

Woolly groundsel is listed as an endangered species in Minnesota. Gravel mining and overgrazing in woolly groundsel habitat are cited as major threats (Minnesota DNR 2012). Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g., threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Description

**General:** Sunflower family (Asteraceae). Woolly groundsel is a low growing perennial forb with short rhizomes. Mature plants reach 8 to 30 cm (3 to 12 in) in height. The stems and leaves are densely woolly giving it a grayish appearance. The basal leaves are lanceolate to oblanceolate, 1 to 5 cm (0.4 to 2 in) long and 0.3 to 3 cm (0.12 to 1.2 in) wide. The margins are entire to minutely toothed. The stem leaves reduce in size going upward along the stem. In late spring the plants bear 2 to 10 flower heads with orange disk flowers and 8 to 13 yellow ray flowers approximately 5 to 10 mm (0.2 to 0.4 in) in length (Welsh et al 2003). The fruit is an achene with a pappus of capillary bristles. The seed is wind dispersed (Andersen 1993). There are approximately 600,000 seeds per pound (USDA NRCS 2012).

**Distribution:** Woolly groundsel is found from Kansas, Minnesota and Manitoba westward to the Pacific states and south to California, Nevada and Colorado. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

**Habitat:** Woolly groundsel occupies rocky sites in mountain shrub, pinyon-juniper, Douglas fir, spruce-fir and alpine tundra communities. It can often be found in talus slopes and high ridges.

### Adaptation

Woolly groundsel is adapted to a broad range of soils from coarse to fine, but is typically found in sandy to rocky areas with a soil pH of 6.5 to 8.5. It can be found in areas receiving as little as 200 mm (8 in) annual precipitation (USDA NRCS 2012).

### Establishment

No seed or plant establishment information could be located.

### Management

Woolly groundsel can be used as a minor component of seed mixtures. Management strategies should be based on the key species in the established plant community.

Grazing should be deferred on seeded lands for at least two growing seasons to allow for full stand establishment.

### **Pests and Potential Problems**

Many members of the genus *Packera* and *Senecio* are known to contain toxic alkaloids which can cause liver disease in livestock and humans (Burrows and Tyrl 2001). Woolly groundsel is a host plant for the aphid species *Aphis senecionis* (Williams 1891).

### **Environmental Concerns**

Woolly groundsel is native to western North America. There are no known environmental concerns associated with this species. The toxic compounds found in these species pose a threat to grazing animals if consumed in sufficient quantities.

### **Seed and Plant Production**

No propagation or seed production information could be found for this species.

### **Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

There are currently no commercial releases of woolly groundsel. Common seed and greenhouse grown materials are available on the commercial market.

The Aberdeen Plant Materials Center cooperated with the USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Poisonous Plants Laboratory to evaluate a number of *Senecio* and *Packera* species including woolly groundsel for toxic properties. Based on the findings, the plant materials center discontinued further evaluation of *Senecio* and *Packera* spp. for potential release (Tilley and St. John 2011).

### **References**

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