

# Giant Ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*)

## DESCRIPTION:

Giant ragweed is a native annual plant which can be a major agricultural pest. The wind-born pollen of giant ragweed also causes hay fever. However, this member of the aster family also has an ecological niche, and should only be controlled if they are retarding restoration efforts, or in cases where their presence might be upsetting farmers or allergy sufferers. Over a dozen species of moths are known to feed on the foliage of ragweeds, as do grasshoppers. The seeds of ragweed are an important food source for native songbirds and upland game birds such as bobwhite and prairie chickens. Though they can form dense stands and exclude most other plants, giant ragweed has been known to rapidly disappear from areas it once dominated as more conservative species become established. The spongy pith in the center of the stems of these plants was used like chewing gum by Native Americans. Giant Ragweed's natural habitat includes wet places like floodplains or sediment deposits in stream corridors, but they are now found in many sunny to slightly shady places disturbed by human activity including field edges, soil piles, heavily grazed pastures, construction sites and young prairies.

**0**  
Pesky  
Native

## IDENTIFICATION:

Typically from 5' to 12' in height, this rapidly growing annual plant tends to form large colonies in weedy areas. The coarse stems are sturdy and range from 1/4" to 1" in diameter. Leaves, which are arranged oppositely on the stem are large, are highly variable in size and shape, often have finely serrated edges with three to five large palmate lobes each with a pointed tip. Green flower spikes 3-6" in length can be found on the top of the plant "blooming" in late summer and early fall. Due to its large size and relatively distinctive leaves it is not easily confused with other species.

## CONTROL METHODS:

**Organic:** Giant Ragweed is most effectively controlled by cutting and mowing in late summer, immediately before they go to bloom or early in the blooming period. Young plants or small populations can also be pulled up by the roots.

**Chemical:** Giant ragweed will also be killed if sprayed with glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) or by one of many broadleaf specific herbicides. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply herbicide according to the product label.

## NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Since this is a full-sun weed we recommend a diverse selection of prairie species to replace and compete against ragweed in order to develop a more stable and productive plant community for the site. Contact us for specific recommendations.

