



# HAWKSBEARD

## WHY IS IT A WEED?

It's a competitor of turf and pasture

## WHERE IS IT FOUND?

All across New Zealand

## IS IT TOXIC?

No

## ALTERNATIVE USES?

None

I MIGHT HAVE said this before but I really do love tripping around the country for my job. I am all over the place: one week it's the West Coast and Kaikoura, the next it's Tauranga, after that it's Rotorua. It seems farmers everywhere are more interested in what's happening below the soil and how we can use that information to improve what's happening above the soil.

This month we are continuing with our series on the similar-looking weeds: dandelion, catsear, hawkbeard and hawkbit.

Hawkbeard (*Crepis capillaris*) is a common annual weed found all across New Zealand. It is primarily a pain in perennial crops such as pasture and lucerne, and an unsightly contaminant of lawns and turf. About half a dozen plants are winking at me from my lawn even as I type.

It is non-toxic, and some related species of the genus (*Crepis*) are actually grown and used in salads or boiled in Greece.

But it can be difficult to correctly identify hawkbeard as it looks so much like dandelion and the others.

It begins its life in the spring or autumn as a flat rosette of strongly-lobed, almost jagged leaves. It's at this point you have the best chance of telling it from catsear and hawkbit. Hawkbeard will have nearly hairless smooth



Photo: Harry Rose Wikimedia Commons

leaves whereas catsear and hawkbit will be hairy.

In spring it produces a flower stem and it will branch into multiple flowers, unlike dandelion and hawkbit which only produce a single flower per stem. The flower stem will also have small fine leaves coming off it (unlike catsear stems which are leafless). The

hawkbeard's flower is almost identical to the other weeds, and produces a large number of seeds with umbrella-like pappus attached to them which allows the wind to carry the seeds far and wide. After flowering, the hawkbeard plant will die.

## HOW TO CONTROL IT

This can be a bit of a mixed bag. If you have a vigorously growing pasture or turf, then there won't be bare patches of soil where hawkbeard can establish and the problem never eventuates.

When bare patches appear such as through poor establishment of grass, grazing damage or if it's an open crop like lucerne, then an infestation can happen quickly. If this occurs then chemical control is the only option as the plants are too close to the ground to be effectively grazed and their large taproot means they will recover from cultivation. There are a few options available to control hawkbeard – dicamba, MCPA, 2,4 D - which work very well in lawns and turf, but in pasture they will be very hard on clover.

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Photo: Christian Fischer-Wikimedia Common

