

Preface

This Code of Practice provides information about the biology of plants containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids, about the potential risk of poisoning and the control measures when planting. The focus was put on the **recognition** of the poisonous weeds. At this stage 15 fact sheets of the most important weeds were created. Further elaborations are planned.

In the introduction the current state of knowledge about these plant substances are summarized and the main minimization measures are illustrated.

Introduction

Summary of the current state of knowledge of these plant substances

For quite a long time it has been known, that single shoots and their species from certain plant families are able to produce so-called pyrrolizidine alkaloids (abbr.: PA). These secondary plant substances are mainly a protection against herbivores, also some butterfly caterpillars are using the poison for protection by eating the plants.

So far, there are more than 600 different PAs known. From the current 300 types of plants, different PAs have been isolated in varying concentrations. Presumably, more than 6000 different plants can produce pyrrolizidine alkaloids.

Currently about 100 of the recognized PAs are known to severely damage the liver and are cancerogenic. However not all PAs are equally toxic. To this day the extend of the toxicity for each PA cannot be exactly determined yet.

The main variety of plants, which can produce PA, are from the following families:

Boraginaceae Asteraceae Fabaceae

During the investigation of the PA-containing weeds, in regards to their PA-levels the following values have been determined:

Groundsel/narrow-leaved ragwort/Eastern groundsel < **1000 mg/kg** Strict forget-me-not/sticky groundsel ~ **100 mg/kg** Field forget-me-not ~ **10 mg/kg**.

Sporadically PA-producing plants may stem from different plant families, like **Crassulaceae**, **Euphorbiaceae**, **Poaceae** and 8 to 10 further families.

It is important to know, that in case of **Asteraceae**, e.g. Senecio species, the PAs are mainly produced in the roots. However, a particularly high concentration can be found in the flowers and seeds of the Asteraceae e.g. **Senecio types**.



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Therefore, it is of great importance, to not only completely rip out the PA plants, but to remove them from the cultivation field.

Other plants like the Boraginaceae (Anchusa/Myosotis/Symphytum) build the PA also in the leaves.

Meanwhile it is known that medicinal plants which are unable to produce PAs on their own are able to absorb PAs from the ground.

In this context, the main concern is harvesting PA-containing weeds. Contamination with individual PA-plants on the field can already lead to analytically measurable traces and might lead to an unusable harvest.

For you, as a grower, the following is important to know:

The growing field has to be inspected at an early growing stage and every weed, especially PA weeds have to be pulled out, hacked and removed from the field. Permitted herbicides with an effect against dicotyledonous plants/chamomile-like weeds have to be sprayed systematically onto the weeds. Restrictions of use applicable in the country of origin as well as the import country have to be taken into account. These weeds also have to be completely removed from the field.

Medical plants like chamomile, peppermint, melissa, fennel and stinging nettle are unable to produce pyrrolizidine alkaloids. Exceptionally, some plants formerly used as medicinal drugs are known to contain PAs, e.g.:

coltsfoot comfrev butterbur

Further species, which were known in pharmacies in Germany as officinal drugs and were sold as a medicinal drug are:

corn gromwell bugloss houndstongue hemp-agrimony wood ragwort

The use of these five medicinal plants, which are today known as weeds, have been strictly forbidden since 1992.

Therefore, already in 1992, the former Federal Health Agency had banned certain groups of drugs, which contain PAs, from sale in pharmacies (Graduated plan; see above). For coltsfoot, comfrey and butterbur the usage was strongly restricted and the maximum daily application of PAs was limited.

Since then drugs such as coltsfoot and comfrey are analyzed in special laboratories and are only released in charges where the PA-levels comply with the specification.



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Until July 2013 there were no hints, that there may be weeds with PA-levels in customary species (collected or planted drugs).

There is **no reported case** of liver damage or cancer, which could be traced back to the regular consumption of normal tea drugs, such as peppermint, melissa, fennel or chamomile.

Under German medicinal law the maximum daily limit for medicinal herbs is 1.0 µg PA, since the 1st of May 2016. In case of food three values are applied for risk assessment. The dose range for the acute Risk is 1-3 mg/kg body weight and day. This exposure area might cause serious injury to health after already short intake. The current toxicologic reference value for the chronic-non-carcinogenic risk is 0.1 µg/kg body weight and day. The benchmark for the chronic-carcinogenic risk is 0.0237 µg/kg body weight and day.

Due to these facts it is necessary to prevent PA-producing plants growing on the fields.

The annex consists of profiles of diverse PA-producing plants. These profiles can help the grower to identify PA-producing plants to completely remove them from the field.

Please contact us for further information.

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Botanical name	Common name	Family
ANCHUSA ARVENSIS L.	SMALL BUGLOSS	Boraginaceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe, North Africa, Near	Nov
	East	Oct Mar
Soil quality	nitrogenous, lime- and alkaline-	Sept
	poor; sandy soils also	Aug May
Plant height	15 to 40 cm	July June
Flowering period	May until September	
Generation cycle	annual until winter annual	
Characteristics	although in some other	
	cultivations	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Small Bugloss (Anchusa arvensis L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
ANCHUSA OFFICINALIS L.	COMMON BUGLOSS	Boraginaceae

		_ Dec Jan
Occurrence	East and Middle Europe,	Nov Feb
	Ukraine until Baltics	Oct Mar
Soil quality	dry until sandy soils, calcifuge	Sept
Plant height	30 to 80 cm	Aug
Flowering period	May until September	July June
Generation cycle	biennial until perennial	
Characteristics	although in some other	-
	cultures	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Common Bugloss (Anchusa officinalis L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
BUGLOSSOIDES ARVENSIS	CORN GROMWELL	Boraginaceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe, West Asia, Africa	Nov
Soil quality	alkaline-rich, nutritious,	Oct
	humus-poor, loam and clay	Sept April
	soils, calcicoles	Aug
Plant height	10 to 50 cm	July June
Flowering period	April until June	
Generation cycle	annual until winter annual	Note: In parts of Germany an
Germination capacity	germ as of 10°C soil	endangered species!
	temperature	Blossoms/seeds PA-rich!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Corn Gromwell (Buglossoides arvensis L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
ECHIUM VULGARE L.	VIPER'S BUGLOSS	Boraginaceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe and Asia	Nov
Soil quality	(semi-)dry, modest	Oct
Plant height	25 to 100 cm	Sept April
Flowering period	May until October	Aug May July June
Generation cycle	biennial, semi-rosette shrub	ŕ
Characteristics	widespread on sandy soils	Note: Up to 2000 long-lasting
		seeds!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Viper's Bugloss (Echium vulgare L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
HELIOTROPIUM	EUROPEAN TURN-SOLE	Boraginaceae
EUROPAEUM L.		

Dec

Jan

Occurrence	Middle-Europe and Asia	Nov Feb
Soil quality	loose, nutritious, very	Oct
	thermophilic	Sept
Plant height	up to 50 cm	Aug May
Flowering period	July until September	July Jule
Generation cycle	annual	
Germination capacity	seeds germinate in spring,	
	spreading through seeds	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

European turn-sole (Heliotropium europaeum L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
MYOSOTIS ARVENSIS L.	FIELD FORGET-ME-NOT	Boraginaceae

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		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Middle-Europe and Asia	Nov Feb
Soil quality	aerated, humid, sandy clay	Oct Mar
	soils	Sept
Plant height	up to 40 cm	Aug
Flowering period	April until December	July Julie
Generation cycle	annual until winter annual	Note: Large amount of seeds
Germination capacity	seeds germinable for years	with high values of PA!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Field forget-me-not (Myosotis arvensis L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
MYOSOTIS STRICTA L.	STRICT FORGET-ME-NOT	Boraginaceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Middle-Europe, Asia, Africa	Nov
Soil quality	sandy	Oct
Plant height	5 to 20 cm	Sept April
Flowering period	March until May	Aug May
Generation cycle	annual until winter annual	July Julic
Germination capacity	long-lasting seeds	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times



Strict forget-me-not (Myosotis stricta L.)

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Botanical name	Common name	Family
SYMPHYTUM OFFICINALE	COMMON COMFREY	Boraginaceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe and Asia	Nov
Soil quality	nitrogenous, humid, nutritious	Oct
Plant height	30 to 100 cm	Sept April
Flowering period	May until July	Aug May July June
Generation cycle	perennial	
Germination capacity	germination through seeds	Note: Smallest root parts will
	and roots	sprout again!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against dicotyledonous
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Common comfrey (Symphytum officinale L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
EUPATORIUM	HEMP-AGRIMONY	Asteraceae
CANNABINUM L.		

Dec

Jan

Occurrence	Europe, North-America, Asia	Nov
Soil quality	humid, nutritious	Oct
Plant height	50 to 150 cm	Sept April
Flowering period	July until September	Aug
Generation cycle	perennial	Note: Pollen of the plant can
Characteristics	spreads quickly	cause the contamination!

Control measuresWeeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!Prevention of seed formation and soil damageAuthorized herbicides with effects against AsteraceaeRemove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working toolsPlough dormant fields several times

Hemp-Agrimony (Eupatorium cannabinum L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
SENECIO ERUCIFOLIUS L.	HOARY RAGWORT	Asteraceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe and Asia	Nov Feb
Soil quality	almost all soil types	Oct
Plant height	30 to 125 cm	Sept April
Flowering period	July until September	Aug May July June
Generation cycle	perennial	, i
Characteristics	high amount of PAs in flowers	Note: In parts of Germany an
	and seeds	endangered species!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against Asteraceae
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Hoary ragwort (Senecio erucifolius L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
SENECIO JACOBAEA L.	Common ragwort	Asteraceae

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		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe, Asia, North-Africa	Nov
Soil quality	almost all soil types	Oct
Plant height	30 to100 cm	Sept
Flowering period	June until October	Aug May
Generation cycle	biennial until perennial germination – first year leaf rosette – second year inflorescence	Note: Up to 140 000 seeds per plant! Widespread willow
Characteristics	seeds immediately germinable; especially toxic for horses	weeds!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against Asteraceae
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Common ragwort (Senecio jacobaea L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
SENECIO VERNALIS L.	EASTERN GROUNDSEL	Asteraceae

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		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe and Asia	Nov Feb
Soil quality	nutritious	Oct
Plant height	0.2 to 60 cm	Sept
Flowering period	May until August	Aug May
Generation cycle	perennial	July Julie
Germination capacity	long-lasting seeds	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against Asteraceae
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Eastern groundsel (Senecio vernalis L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
SENECIO VULGARIS L.	GORUNDSEL	Asteraceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	worldwide	Nov
Soil quality	almost all soil types	Oct
Plant height	10 to 40 cm	Sept
Flowering period	January until December	Aug
Generation cycle	5 to 6 weeks	July Julio
Characteristics	seeds immediately	Note: Up to 12 000 long-
	germinable; fast growing plant	lasting seeds per plant!

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against Asteraceae
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Groundsel (Senecio vulgaris L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
TUSSILAGO FARFARA L.	COLTSFOOT	Asteraceae

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		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europa, Asia, Africa	Nov
Soil quality	humid, calcicole	Oct
Plant height	10 to 30 cm	Sept
Flowering period	February until April	Aug May
Generation cycle	perennial	
Germination capacity	seeds short-lived, light-	
	depending germination	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against Asteraceae
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Coltsfoot (Tussilago Farfara L.)



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Botanical name	Common name	Family
Petasites hybridus L.	BUTTERBUR	Asteraceae

		Dec Jan
Occurrence	Europe, Asia, Africa	Nov
Soil quality	humid, nutritious	Oct
Plant height	10 to 40 cm	Sept April
Flowering period	March until May	Aug July June May
Generation cycle	perennial	
Germination capacity	seeds short-lived	

Control measures	Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots!
	Prevention of seed formation and soil damage
	Authorized herbicides with effects against Asteraceae
	Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools
	Plough dormant fields several times

Butterbur (Petasites hybridus L.)





Botanical name	Common name	Family
Crotalaria spp.	RATTLEPOD	Fabaceae

Occurrence	Asia, Africa, South-America	
	(tropical)	
Soil quality	humid, nutritious	KAN BAN
Critical use	as green fertilizer (!)	
Application	few species used as legumes	
	in tropical Africa;	
	Crotalaria juncea as ayurvedic	
	medicine in India	
Generation cycle	annual until perennial	
Toxicity	completely different toxicity by	
	humans and animals	Crotalaria pallida Source: Wikipedia

Control measures

Weeding/chopping/digging, together with the roots! Don't use plants as green fertilizer! Ground transport of PAs into cultivated plants is scientifically proven! Remove plants of the field, thoroughly clean the working tools

RATTLEPOD (Crotalaria spp.)



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Botanical name	Deutsch	English	Français	Русский язык	Español
Anchusa arvensis L.	Acker Ochsenzunge	Small bugloss	Buglosse des champs	Волови́к полево́й	Buglosa/lengua de buey
Anchusa officinalis L.	Gemeine Ochsenzunge	Common bugloss	Buglosse officinale	Волови́к лека́рственный	Argamala
Buglossoides arvensis L	Acker-Steinsame	Corn gromwell	Grémil des champs	Буглоссои́дес полево́й	Abremanos
Crotalaria ssp.	Klapperhülse	Rattlepod/sunn hemp	Crotalaire	Кроталярия	Crotalaria
Echium vulgare L.	Gewöhnlicher Natternkopf	Viper's bugloss/blueweed	Vipérine commune	Синяк обыкнове́нный	Buglosa salvaje
Eupatorium cannabinum L.	Gewöhnlicher Wasserdost	Hemp-agrimony/holy rope	Eupatoire chanvrine	Посконник коноплёвый	Eupatorio de los árabes
Heliotropium europaeum L.	Europäische Sonnenwende	European turn-sole	Héliotrope d'Europe	Гелиотроп европейский	Heliotropio común
Myosotis arvensis L.	Ackervergissmeinnicht	Field forget-me-not	Myosotis des champs	Незабудка альпийская	Nomeolvides
Myosotis stricta L.	Sandvergissmeinnicht	Strict forget-me-not	Myosotis raide	Незабудка болотная	Nomeolvides
Petasites hybridus L.	Pestwurz	Butterbur	Grand pétasite	Белокопы́тник	Petasites
Senecio erucifolius L	Raukenblättriges Kreuzkraut	Hoary ragwort	Séneçon à feuilles de roquette	Крестовник эруколистный	Sacapeos
Senecio jacobaea L.	Jacobs-Kreuzkraut	Common ragwort/St. James-wort	Séneçon de Jacob	Якобея обыкновенная	Afrentaquinteros
Senecio vernalis L.	Frühlings-Kreuzkraut	Eastern groundsel	Séneçon printanier	Крестовник весенний	Ambrosia vernal
Senecio vulgaris L.	Gemeines Kreuzkraut	Groundsel	Séneçon commun	Крестовник обыкнове́нный	Amargaza amarilla
Symphytum officinale L	Echter Beinwell	Common comfrey	Consoude officinale	Око́пник лека́рственный	Consuelda
Tussilago Farfara L.	Huflattich	Coltsfoot	Tussilage/pas-d'âne	Ма́ть-и-ма́чеха	Uña de caballo