

WEED FILE: BUTTERCUP

REVISED: SEPTEMBER 2025



Giant Buttercup



Creeping Buttercup



Giant buttercup – *Ranunculus acris* Creeping buttercup – *Ranunculus repens*

DESCRIPTION

These are two similar perennial buttercup species commonly found in New Zealand pastures. While they have distinct growth habits, their control methods are largely the same.

Giant buttercup forms an upright bush up to 1m tall, while creeping buttercup is lower-growing with stems that creep along the ground for up to 1m. Both produce glossy yellow flowers with five petals up to 25mm diameter at the top of erect flowering stems. Giant buttercup flowers November-April, while creeping buttercup flowers October-February.

The leaves provide the best identification feature: Giant buttercup leaves are deeply jagged and appear as a single leaf, whereas creeping buttercup leaves are more rounded and clearly divided into three leaflets, with the central leaflet on a short stalk.

Both species produce seeds, with giant buttercup seeds commonly transported in hay - the most frequent source of new infestations. Creeping buttercup spreads primarily through an extensive stolon system, allowing rapid invasion of nearby areas where it typically out-competes pasture grasses and clovers.

HABITAT

Buttercups are found throughout New Zealand and prefer wet conditions, making them a particular problem on:

- Dairy farms and high rainfall areas
- Poorly drained paddocks and wet spots
- Areas around water troughs and gateways
- Margins of good pasture areas

The leaves contain compounds that make them unpalatable to cattle and horses, although sheep will readily eat them. This selective grazing pressure allows buttercups to establish and spread in cattle and horse paddocks.

MANUAL REMOVAL

Isolated plants appearing on margins of good pasture can be successfully dug out before they invade deeper into the pasture. Complete removal of the entire root system is essential, as buttercups will regrow from rhizomes or root segments left in the soil. Manual removal becomes impractical for larger infestations due to the extensive root systems and stolon networks.

HERBICIDE CONTROL

Optimal Timing: Best results achieved during active growth periods from spring through early summer to February.

BOOM SPRAYING (PER HECTARE)

Selective Options for Pasture:

- **Ranger** 20g/ha - Very effective against both species and docks simultaneously. Follow-up treatment likely required the following spring. Yellowing and reduced pasture vigour will occur. Complete recovery, particularly of clovers, may take up to 4 months depending on pasture condition and growing conditions. The low application rate and very low toxicity makes this a popular herbicide for people grazing horses as clover is not such an issue.
- **Decision** 50g/ha (annual buttercup) or 65g/ha (giant buttercup) - Pasture and clover friendly option
- **Pasture Star** 3-4L/ha - Good control at seedling stage (2-3 leaves), useful suppression at later stages. Safe for grasses, clover, cereals, peas and seed crops
- **WHACK – 2,4-D 800** 1-3kg/ha - Controls seedling buttercup, pasture friendly with minimal clover damage
- **MCPA 750** – Annual buttercup: 1.5-2L/ha (use lower rate on seedlings). Perennial buttercup: 2-3L/ha at early flower bud stage when plants 30-40cm high. Multiple treatments usually required.

For Orchards/Vineyards:

- **GA200** 7.5-10L/ha - Effective at higher rates, particularly safe for orchard and vineyard use

Non-Selective Options:

- **Glyphosate 360** 4-5L/ha for spray-out prior to pasture renewal or cropping
- **Glyphosate 540** 2.7-3.3L/ha
- **Granny Herbicide** 1.8-2.3kg/ha

SPOT SPRAYING

For spot spraying applications, our Spray Rate Conversion calculator can be used, however this is difficult with very low hectare rate products like Ranger and Decision.