

SPOTLIGHT

COMMON GROUNDSEL



Top: Common groundsel flowering at the base of a mailbox on a sidewalk on South Street, January 23rd. It is producing seeds.

Bottom: Close up of groundsel's flowers.

Common groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) in Center City blooms while rooted in cracks in concrete in the dead of winter. Such extreme conditions insulate it from competitors and enemies. Groundsel is endowed with toxins (pyrrolizidine alkaloids), toothed leaves, salt tolerance, lead tolerance, and herbicide resistance. It reproduces by self-pollination or cross-pollination, depending on season and conditions.¹ Its seeds disperse on silken threads blown by the wind. Its annual growth habit is adapted to ephemeral habitats, such as those in Center City. Introduced from Europe, it was established as a weed in the city at the time of publication of Philadelphia's first flora in 1818.²