

Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)

-3
Aggressive
Weed

DESCRIPTION:

Poison hemlock was introduced to North America in the 1800s from Europe, western Asia, and North Africa as a garden plant for its attractive ferny foliage. This member of the carrot family is toxic to most animals and eating even a small fragment can kill a human. All parts of the plant are poisonous, but the root is especially toxic. This biennial or short-lived perennial prefers moist soils and full to partial sun. In such habitats it forms dense stands that out-compete natives for space and light. It spreads extensively by seed, producing more than 30,000 seeds per plant and remains viable in the soil for several years. These seeds are released from late summer into winter and are dispersed by water, wind, and attaching itself to fabric and fur. Since it is a new invader you should report any sightings of this plant to the DNR (see: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/report.html>).

IDENTIFICATION:

In the first year poison hemlock produces large rosette leaves; the second year a tall stem emerges and the plant flowers. Poison hemlock grows 3 to 10 ft. tall with a ribbed hollow stem with purple spots. This species has a umbel shape flower cluster with small white flowers that have petals and blooms June to July. Leaves are opposite and triangular in outline and have a fern like shape. Leaves when crushed release a foul odor.

Poison hemlock can be confused with water hemlock, a rare native found only in good-quality wetlands, but the leaves can help distinguish these two species. In poison hemlock, the leaf veins run to the tips of the teeth; whereas in water hemlock, leaf veins run to the notches between the teeth. Poison hemlock is also somewhat similar to wild carrot. Wild harvesting this plant instead of wild carrot could be a fatal mistake.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Second year plants can be hand pulled during its flowering stage, but before producing seed. Dead plants should be bagged and disposed of in the trash. It is important to wear gloves when hand pulling this species as it can cause dermatitis in some people, and avoid breathing in particles of the plant. Mowing in spring and fall have been shown to be effective at killing second year plants and resprouts. These methods may need to be repeated for several times a season and for several years to exhaust the seed bank.

Chemical: Glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) is effective for control. To avoid damage to nearby native plants, it can be applied to the first year rosettes in late fall after most native species have gone dormant or in early spring before native species have become active again. The temperature must be above 45 F, and there should not be rain in the forecast for at least 12 hours after treatment. Triclopyr (Garlon, Weed-B-Gon®, etc.) is broadleaf specific and can be used where there is a risk of injuring native sedges or grasses. Applying herbicide as plants begin to bolt in early summer may be necessary to control large populations of poison hemlock, but care must be taken not to harm other plants. If the hemlock begins to flower it may be best to mow it first to prevent seed production, then return to apply herbicide in roughly a week. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply herbicide according to the product label.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

We recommend a diverse selection of prairie species to replace and compete against poison hemlock in order to develop a more stable and productive plant community for the site. Contact us for specific recommendations. Cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*) and water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*) are two native alternatives that have a similar appearance to poison hemlock.

