

Poison Hemlock

(*Conium maculatum*)

Parsley Family

**Non-regulated Class B
Noxious Weed: Control
Recommended**

Identification Tips

- Tall biennial, reaching 8 to 10 feet the second year
- Bright green, fernlike leaves with strong musty smell
- First year plants form low clumps of lacy leaves with reddish or spotted stems
- Second year stems are stout, hollow, hairless, ribbed, with reddish or purple spotting/streaking
- Flowering plants covered with numerous small, umbrella-shaped clusters of tiny white flowers that have five petals
- Seeds form in green, ridged capsules that eventually turn brown

Biology

Reproduces by seed. First year grows into a rosette; second year, develops tall stems and flowers. Rapid growth from March to May, flowers in late spring. Up to 40,000 seeds per plant are produced. Seeds fall near the plant and are moved by erosion, animals, rain and human activity. Seeds viable up to 6 years and germinate throughout the growing season; do not require a dormant period.

Impacts

Acutely toxic to livestock, wildlife, humans; causes death by respiratory paralysis after ingestion. Aggressive growth crowds out desirable vegetation. Early spring growth makes it more likely to be eaten by animals when there is limited forage available.

Distribution

Eurasian species, widely found in North America. Widespread in King County; found along roadsides, riparian areas, ravines, fields, ditches and un-managed yards and vacant lots. Prefers moist soil and sun, but can adapt to dryer soil and shadier conditions. Can be mistaken for a carrot when small.

What You Can Do

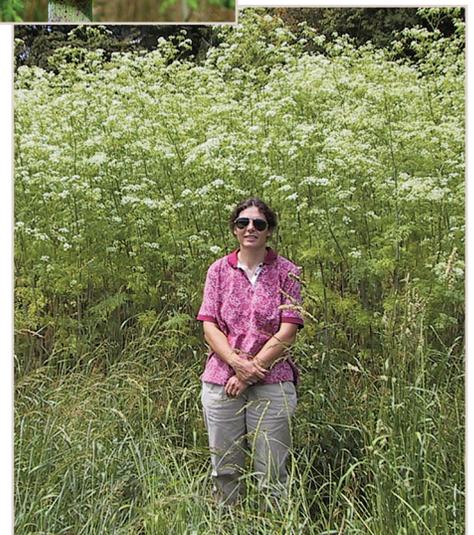
Poison hemlock is so widespread in King County control is not required, but this plant should be removed whenever possible, especially in areas that are accessible to people, pets and livestock. **All parts of the plant are poisonous when eaten and even dead canes remain toxic for up to three years.** Toxins can also be absorbed through the skin and respiratory system so always wear protective clothing (gloves, long sleeves, dust mask) when handling this plant. **If you suspect poisoning, call for help immediately.** In both humans and animals, quick medical treatment can reverse the effects of hemlock poisoning.



Poison hemlock has white flowers, fernlike leaves, and thick stems with purple spotting.



All parts of this plant (the roots, stems, flowers, seeds, leaves) are poisonous.



Poison hemlock quickly invades open areas, displacing beneficial plants.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program Line: **206-477-WEED** www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

Control Methods

Manual:

For small sites, pull or dig up plants. Remove entire root. Wear protective clothing and wash your hands thoroughly after handling plant matter. To be fully effective, all mature plants need to be removed so no new seeds are produced. Do not leave flower heads on the ground as the seeds can remain viable. Composting is not recommended; instead place in a plastic trash bag and toss into your regular trash.

Mechanical:

To prevent seeding, plants can be mowed or cut back with a weed-eater before going to flower. Protect yourself with a dust mask to avoid inhaling toxins while mowing. Adding a layer of mulch to the area after it has been cleared or replanting with desirable vegetation will reduce germination of poison hemlock seeds present in the soil. Monitor mowed areas as plants often grow back after being mowed.

Chemical:

Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. Herbicides should only be applied at the rates specified on the label. Foliar herbicides are most effective if applied

to actively growing plants in the spring, followed by another application later in the summer for late sprouts. Spray plants before they flower for best results. Spraying may not prevent seed production in mature plants. A selective broadleaf herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr, 2,4-D or metsulfuron will work well for lawn or pasture areas as it won't harm grasses. Glyphosate products (such as Roundup) work also but they kill grass as well as broadleaf plants. Apply the herbicide to the entire leaf and stem surface and do not cut down the treated plants until they have died. This may take two weeks or more. Seeds germinate throughout the season, so repeat treatment is necessary to eliminate all plants. Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. For questions about herbicide use, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.



In late winter, look for mounds of bright green, lacy leaves. The largest clumps are second-year plants building up energy to flower and seed later in the spring.



Could be confused with:

Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*) as well as other similar-looking members of the parsley family including fennel, chervil and anise resemble Poison Hemlock.

However, poison hemlock can be distinguished in a couple of ways. It grows to heights of 8 feet or more; its leaves give off a strong musty smell; and its hairless stems have reddish or purple blotches/spotting. In contrast, wild carrot typically only grows to about 3 feet; its plain green stems have fine hairs with fewer branches; and it flowers later in the summer.

Wild carrot (sometimes called Queen Anne's Lace) is often confused with poison hemlock.