

Poison Hemlock in Minnesota

Poison hemlock is a member of the carrot family and is related to wild parsnip. Poison hemlock is non-native and contains harmful toxins. Livestock can get into trouble if eating too much of the vegetation. Humans can be poisoned by handling the plant (pulling for removal), sap from broken plant parts (i.e. working under a mower deck) and ingestion of plant parts.

The danger is not a rash like one can get from wild parsnip. Eating plant parts or potentially absorption of toxins from the sap through the skin can cause severe illness – and in extreme cases death! Children and livestock are likely at highest risk. Adults have been poisoned after mistaking the root for edible wild parsnip roots or foliage is mistaken for parsley.

Identification

Plant: Herbaceous, biennial, first year as a cluster of leaves growing directly from the ground and second year poison hemlock is a branched, 3-7 feet tall, robust plant. Stems are smooth (no hairs), hollow, appear ridged due to veins and are light green, mottled (spotted) with purplish spots.

Crushed plant parts reportedly exude a foul odor.

Leaves: Alternate, generally triangular in form. Doubly or triply pinnately compound up to 18 inches long by 12 inches wide. Leaflets are fern-like, deeply divided and typically twice as long (2 inches) as wide (1 inch). Basal leaves tend to be larger and have longer petiole stalks than upper stem leaves. Petiole to stem attachments are covered by a sheath.

Flower: Numerous small white flowers arranged in clusters that are shaped like an umbrella. Each individual flower is small with 5 petals. There are leaf-like structures called bracts under each cluster.

Bloom time varies from June to August, then plant parts wither.



Flowers during second year









Leaves of first year rosette



Stems are hollow and often purple spotted.

Poison Hemlock Look-a-Likes

Wild Carrot (Queen Anne's Lace)	Wild Parsnip	Water Hemlock (native)
 <p>Nonnative <u>Key difference:</u> showy, branched leaf-like structures beneath flower clusters. Stems are hairy, green.</p>	 <p>Nonnative <u>Key difference:</u> flowers are yellow and leaves are not lacy in appearance Stems are green with definite ridges</p> <p><i>First year rosette</i></p>	 <p><u>Key difference:</u> leaves are deeply veined and not lacy. No leaf-like structures at bases of flower heads. Stems often purplish, maybe green</p>
Cow Parsnip (native)	Great angelica (native)	Yarrow (native)
 <p><u>Key difference:</u> Cow parsnip leaf is 3-parted and can be 18 inches across and long. Flower clusters are tighter. Stems are hairy, green to purple in color.</p>	 <p><u>Key difference:</u> Leaves are 3-parted and not lacy. Flowers are bunched in ball-like clusters Stems are purple, smooth.</p>	 <p><u>Key difference:</u> Yarrow, a member of the aster family. Typically 12-24 inches in height. Leaves are very finely divided giving a feather-like appearance. Stems are fuzzy, green.</p>

For more information

Visit MnDOT's Roadside Vegetation Management website or contact Dave Hanson, MnDOT Office of Environmental Stewardship, 651-366-3632