



FACT SHEET

POISON HEMLOCK (*Conium maculatum*)

- Poison hemlock grows four to ten feet tall.
- The stem is branched and **hairless**, mottled with purple spots.
- The leaves are shiny green, fern-like and finely divided, with a musty smell, but **no hairs**.
- The white flowers are in umbrella-shaped heads.
- Carrot family.



LOOK ALIKES:

Bur chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis*) grows in damp environments, similar to those occupied by poison hemlock. The plants are very similar, but bur chervil is usually smaller and has a fringe of hairs where the leaf meets the main stem. It is not toxic but is very invasive.



Wild chervil (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) is becoming increasingly common on roadsides in Jefferson County. Also growing in damp environments, it usually has darker, slightly hairy leaves and no purple spots on the stem. It is not toxic but is very invasive. Control is required throughout Jefferson County.



WHY BE CONCERNED?

- All parts of the plant are poisonous.
- The toxins are present in dried plants and decompose slowly.
- It affects livestock such as cows, horses, and pigs; pregnant animals may abort or produce offspring with birth defects.
- Poisoning in humans often occurs when the plant is confused with other, edible members of the carrot family.
- It invades pastures and riparian areas displacing native plants or valuable forage species.

**Poison hemlock is a Class B Noxious Weed.
Control is required county-wide.**

DISTRIBUTION:

Poison hemlock is extremely prolific in Port Townsend, and along Beaver Valley Road.

POISONING SYMPTOMS:

- In animals, poisoning symptoms include nervous trembling, salivation, lack of coordination and dilation of the pupils. If hemlock poisoning is suspected, call a veterinarian. Livestock can be saved if only small amounts have been ingested.
- In humans, symptoms include dilation of the pupils, trembling, dizziness and slowing of the heartbeat. If a human eats poison hemlock, contact the nearest poison control center. Give the victim a tablespoon of salt in a glass of warm water to induce vomiting, and keep the person lying down, warm and quiet, until help arrives.

ECOLOGY:

- Poison hemlock grows mainly in poorly-drained soils, often on stream or ditch banks.
- It is a biennial which usually produces a large rosette of leaves the first year and tall flowering stems the second year. After flowering and setting seed the plants die.
- It reproduces solely by seed.

CONTROL

Prevention and early detection are the best means of control.

- **Avoid** introducing soil or gravel from areas known to have poison hemlock.
- **Remove** seedlings when young because they can usually be pulled easily and they have not had an opportunity to reproduce.
- **Replant** with a desirable (preferably native) plant species, to discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly—bag seed heads. **Plant parts may not be safe for compost piles or left on site because the toxins decompose slowly, taking several years to dissipate.**

DO NOT BURN because burning can release toxins into the air.

- **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

DIGGING/HANDPULLING works best when the soil is moist and with small infestations.

REPEATED MOWING will prevent seed production and weaken the plants, reducing their competitive ability. The site should be carefully monitored, however, because mowed plants can send up new stalks which need to be controlled.

WARNING: Handle plant parts carefully; small amounts of toxins may be absorbed by rubbing eyes or touching mouth after contact with plants. Always wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly after handling the plant.

HERBICIDES can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying a herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount. Long term control requires stopping seed production **and** attacking the weed's root system. Translocated herbicides, (ones that move throughout a plant's system) are recommended. These are most effective on young, actively growing plants because the herbicide moves around the plant more quickly. Also, herbicide is more easily absorbed by clean, new leaves.

- **Note:** Most herbicides will **NOT** prevent germination of weed seeds already in the soil, so monitoring and retreatment are necessary.
- Application in the first year rather than the second year will give better control.
- Livestock should be excluded for up to 2 weeks from treated areas because herbicides may make the plants more palatable, but not less poisonous.

Call the Weed Board for specific herbicide advice.

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