Clallam County Noxious Weed Alert

Poison hemlock

Conium maculatum

Class B Noxious Weed **Control Required**

Extremely toxic to humans and animals

Identification

- Tall branching biennial plant growing up to 7 feet tall
- Seedlings are small and “cilantro-like”
- Stem is erect, hollow, smooth; often having purple splotches, but can be solid green
- Leaves are up to 2 feet long, bright green and alternate along the stem
- Root is a long fleshy taproot, pale yellow in color
- The flowerhead is a compound “umbrella” looking structure with numerous small white flowers
- Seeds are gray-brown with five wavy ridges

*Unlike most other carrot family species growing in the county, poison hemlock is completely hairless

Impacts

Every part of poison hemlock is poisonous. Oils on the surface of the plant are phytotoxic and may cause a skin rash ranging in severity for humans. Smoke from burning fresh or dry plant material can cause irreversible lung damage.

Poison hemlock can be fatally toxic when ingested by humans and animals.

Reproduction

Poison hemlock reproduces by seed only. Seed viability ranges, but it has been noted seeds can survive over 15 years in the soil.

Look-a-likes

Native Cow parsnip

Are there hairs visible on the plant, even if sparse or in a few locations on the plant?

Then it's NOT poison hemlock! It could be burr chervil, wild chervil, wild carrot, giant hogweed or native cow parsnip. Poison hemlock is completely hairless. Please reach out to Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board for identification help.

Giant hogweed

Bur chervil

Wild carrot

Wild chervil

Control Methods

General: Please protect yourself when handling and working around poison hemlock by wearing gloves and protective gear (for example, raingear). Make sure to clean tools, gloves, and protective gear with soap and water after working with poison hemlock. Plant material is still toxic after removal and when dried. Bag and throw away all removed plant material to ensure safe disposal.

Control often takes a couple of years, so checking infestations multiple times a year is necessary.

Do not burn dry or fresh plant material, as burning can release carcinogenic toxins into the air.

Mechanical: It is possible to dig up small infestations of poison hemlock, as long as the entire taproot is removed to prevent regrowth. Manual removal involves soil disturbance, which can promote germination of poison hemlock seeds already in the soil. Be sure to check back throughout the season for regermination or regrowth.

Cultural: Due the to plants toxicity, grazing is not recommended for control.

Chemical: Please follow all regulations and labels when applying herbicides. Always wear personal protective gear (PPE) when using herbicides. In some cases, such as treatment in or around standing water, a permit or special license is required. A systemic herbicide, which will attack both the plant's shoot and root system, is recommended. Adding a surfactant to the herbicide mix is also recommended, as it increases herbicide absorption into the plant. Do not cut or mow plants right before or for 2 weeks after application to allow the plant to absorb the herbicide. Please refer to the herbicide label for livestock and hay restrictions. Chemically treated plants can become more palatable to livestock when plants begin to wilt. Successful treatments will depend on the treatment location, site specifications, timing, and weather. **For more information about herbicides or site specific use, please contact the Noxious Weed Control Board.**

***For best control of poison hemlock, treat when plants emerge in the spring and are rapidly growing but before bolting center stalk develops.**

Clallam County
Noxious Weed Control Board

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