

Poison Hemlock

Invasive Species Alert Sheet

Capital Region Invasive Species Program

The spread of non-native invasive plants has serious ecological, economic and health impacts. Local governments and other partners are asking for help from all residents to address toxic poison hemlock outbreaks on private property and public lands.

Poison hemlock is a priority invasive of concern with serious human health risks.

Originally from Europe, poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is now found in locations across Canada. In the capital region, we are seeing a significant increase in new sites, particularly in locations where soil has been brought in.



Why is poison hemlock a problem?

- **Public health hazard:** Eating even a small amount of any part of this plant can kill people, livestock, and wildlife. Dead plants remain toxic for up to three years. This plant is also toxic to the skin and respiratory system. **If any portion of the plant is ingested, seek medical attention immediately**
- Introduced weedy species that establishes and spreads quickly, with a preference for disturbed site
- Out-competes native vegetation through aggressive growth and prolific seed production
- Could be mistaken for edible plants in the same family (e.g. parsley/carrot)

What does it look like?

- **Tall, extensively branching plant 0.5-3m tall with distinctive purple blotched, thick, hollow, hairless stems**
- Bright green, fern-like triangular leaves are finely-divided, with a strong musty odour
- Tiny, white, 5-petaled flowers form a broad umbrella-shape (up to 0.5m across), on the ends of branches



It can be confused with other plants in the parsley or carrot family such as wild carrot or **Queen Anne's lace** (*Daucus carota*), a smaller plant that grows to about 1m and flowers later in summer or **Pacific hemlock-parsley** (*Conioselinum pacificum*), a smaller plant usually found in coastal habitats.

Habitat and biology

- Prefers moist soils in a sunny location, tolerates shade and drier condition, most common along ditches, road sides, fields, unmanaged yards and disturbed site
- Biennial plant in the Apiaceae (carrot or parsley) family
- Forms a short fern-like rosette in first year, the following spring develops a tall hollow stem, clusters of flowers develop usually April - July
- **Produces over 1000 seeds/plant**, seed production continues into winter

Proper disposal

- Please place all plant part in garbage bags labelled "invasive species" and take to Hartland Landfill. Some local jurisdictions may be able to assist with disposal.
- **Do not compost!** Flowers can still form viable seeds after removal



What should you do if you spot a poison hemlock plant?

- **Spread the word, not the weed:** Don't buy, grow or trade this plant. Using protective methods, clean off footwear, pets, equipment, & vehicles before leaving areas where this species is present
- **Inform:** please report outbreaks to the contacts listed below for support and monitoring
- **Remove:** if you have an outbreak on your property, please follow instructions below for careful removal and follow up
- **Dispose:** of all plant parts in the proper manner outlined below
- **Soil and gravel:** use only soil and gravel that are not contaminated with seeds and only removal soil from infested sites with a safe disposal/treatment plan in place to avoid further spread

For small infestations (less than 25-30 plants)

- **Caution:** All parts of this plant are poisonous. Use gloves, safety glasses and protective clothing when handling this plant, avoid any skin contact or inhaling scent. Wash all clothing and tools afterwards.
- **Manually remove** before flowering, dig or pull to avoid soil disturbance – prevent flowering and seed production
- **Cut:** if unable to remove entire root, cut the plant/root about 3 cm below ground
- **Bag flowers/seeds:** if in flower or seed, carefully remove and bag flowers/seed heads before digging
- **Clean before leaving:** to avoid skins burns and further spread, wash/brush off footwear, vehicles and equipment before leaving site
- **Monitor:** return in spring and fall for a few years to monitor growth and remove new plants
- **Replant:** especially in disturbed areas, replant with non-invasive or native plants

Report large infestations (more than 25 plants) to the contacts below.

CONTACT INFORMATION

P: 250.360.3302
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www.reportaweedbc.ca
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