

WARNING WILD PARSNIP RISK

With the arrival of summer in Leeds & Grenville County comes an abundant new growth of Wild Parsnip. This invasive weed should be avoided as it poses a significant health risk to persons. An explosive growth of Wild Parsnip in recent years has resulted in many residents of Leeds & Grenville County suffering serious burns to the skin as a result of contact with sap from the Wild Parsnip plant.

Wild Parsnip can be found throughout Leeds and Grenville County within uncultivated land, roadside ditches, and parkland, nature trails, and sports fields as well as on and around residential properties.

The best way to avoid contact with the plant is to become familiar with what the plant looks like.

IDENTIFICATION

Stems & Roots: Stems erect 50-150cm (20-60in.) high, branched, hollow except at the nodes; seedlings with small ovate leaves on long stalks/ later rosette leaves pinnately compound with broad leaflets; plants remaining as a rosette during the first season and developing a thick white to yellowish taproot.

Leaves: Stem leaves alternate (1 per node), pinnately compound with usually 2 to 5 pairs of opposite (2 at a place), sharply toothed, relatively broad leaflets that may be somewhat mitten-shaped, and 1 somewhat diamond-shaped leaflet at the tip; all leafstalks broad and completely encircle the stem; uppermost leaves reduced to narrow bracts with flowering branches from their axils.

Flowers & Fruit: Does not flower in its first year of growth. Flowers yellow, small, clustered in compound umbels 10-20cm (4-8in.) across; seeds round in outline, flat and winged. Flowers from late June into late autumn (resembles dill).



Wild parsnip. C.
 Top of flowering stem.

Note: For more information go to Ministry of Agriculture web site:

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture: Plants you don't want to touch!

HOW TO AVOID WILD PARSNIP BURNS

1. Become familiar with the wild parsnip plant and know it by sight.
2. Teach children to recognize wild parsnip
3. Teach children of the potential danger of poisonous plants
4. Discourage children from picking wild flowers.
5. When working around wild parsnip wear goggles, rubber gloves, rubber boots and coveralls. Thoroughly wash boots and gloves with soap, water and a scrub brush before taking off your protective clothing.

Being able to readily identify wild parsnip and early detection of infested areas will minimize inadvertent exposure to this plant and the painful results that follow. Anyone having information on specific locations where this weed is posing a public risk should contact the Counties Noxious & Nuisance Weed Control Office at 613-342-3840 ext. 2413.

WILD PARSNIP MANAGEMENT

It is apparent that Wild Parsnip has established an extensive foothold throughout the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville and it is no longer realistic to expect wild parsnip can be totally eradicated from the region. Accordingly eradication must be based upon assessment of the infestation and the public risk posed. There are multiple eradication options that may be considered before selecting the appropriate approach. These options are outlined below.

Target Areas for Control & Eradication

The following are identified for the purpose of defining what is considered a high risk public area for exposure to harm from wild parsnip.

- Public Playgrounds, Conservation Areas & Parks
- School yards
- Sports Fields
- Residential Property
- Roadsides in Residential & Public Access Areas

Control Methodologies

There are a number of growth control measures that can be reviewed to identify the most favourable approach for each defined problem area. These control measures include:

1. Mechanical- mowing, rotor-tilling, root cutting
2. Hand Pulling
3. Burning
4. Herbicide Control
5. Biological Control

The best way to control wild parsnip is by early detection and eradication. Removing a small or new infestation early will prevent a much larger problem from developing. Regardless of the method used, the goal is to prevent the plants from seeding. Management practices should be based on the quality of the area, the degree of infestation, and public use. In high quality natural areas, eradicate wild parsnip promptly to help preserve the native plant community. Long-term monitoring is a crucial part of any control method used, as seeds in the 'seed bank' will continue to germinate for several years.

CAUTION: IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU WEAR PROTECTIVE CLOTHING AND GOGGLES THAT COVER EXPOSED SKIN WHEN ERADICATING WILD PARSNIP PLANTS

MOWING

- Mowing is a very effective management solution during certain times of the year and where terrain is conducive to reaching the plants with the mower. Poorly timed mowing can increase the number of seedlings and the percentage of plants surviving to maturity. The best way to control the spread of wild parsnip and keep it at bay is to mow or "weed eat" it just when the flower buds are beginning to show (somewhere between late June and early July). To mow or use the weed eater later in the season will actually contribute to spreading the seeds and therefore expand the area of wild parsnip infestation.
- Some plants will re-sprout or flower late, so follow-up mowing or spot-cutting is often necessary.
- If parsnips are mown with a rotary mower, it is very unlikely that there is enough juice in remnants of stem to produce seeds, so mowing with a rotary mower during the late June through early July period can be very effective.
- Continue mowing for at least five years to exhaust the seed bank. Be especially careful when using mowers, weed whips, mechanical string trimmers and other such devices. They tend to spray users with juice and bits of the plants, sometimes leading to hundreds of blisters on exposed skin.
- Wear goggles and protective clothing when mowing.

ROOT DESTRUCTION

A very effective method of destroying smaller isolated patches of wild parsnip is destroying the plant root. It is best to break the tap root with a shovel or spade in order to control these plants.

HAND PULLING

The best control is achieved mainly through hand-pulling. Although this method will kill the plant, it is not practical for large infestations. Where dealing with mature seed heads on plants consideration can be given to carefully removing the seed heads. The seed heads can be cut off and dropped into garbage bags or other containers for safe disposal. This will prevent further spread of the plant and ultimately can result in ridding the area of wild parsnip

HERBICIDE CONTROL

- To date the only effective means of eradicating large patches of wild parsnip is through herbicide spraying.
- Ideal times for application of effective herbicides are in the spring and early summer and again in the fall. Mowing may be more effective in the interim time period.
- The optimal time to eradicate wild parsnip with herbicides is when this biennial weed is in the rosette stage.

BURNING

- Prescribed burns will not kill established plants; they will re-sprout from their taproots.
- Fire often kills newly sprouted seedlings.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

- To date, no effective biological control agents have been identified for wild parsnip.

LIFE CYCLE AND GROWTH

- Wild Parsnip is a biennial meaning it does not flower in its first year of growth. After a plant flowers (normally in its second year) and produces seeds, it dies. When a given plant flowers is determined by the size of the rosette. Plants that reach the critical size by the end of the growing season will flower the following spring.
- Most seeds are dispersed from the parent plant by the end of September and germination occurs from this time through November and again in the spring.

- Wild parsnip has a long germination period, but the optimum time for germination is in the early spring and that is when most germination is expected to occur. Wild parsnip seedlings are among the first plants to green-up early in the spring.
- Being able to readily identify wild parsnip and early detection of infested areas will minimize inadvertent exposure to this plant and the painful results that follow. Anyone having information on specific locations where this weed is posing a public risk should contact the Counties Noxious & Nuisance Weed Control Office at 613-342-3840 ext. 2413.