

Wild Parsnip



(*Pastinaca sativa*)

Photo: Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org



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How to Identify Wild Parsnip

- Usually grows .5 to 1.0 m (1.5 to 3 ft) but mature plant can grow up to 1.5 m tall (5 ft) in second year
- Single green stem, 2 to 5 cm (3/4 to 2 in) thick and smooth with few hairs
- Compound leaves are arranged in pairs, with sharply toothed leaflets that are shaped like a mitten
- Yellowish-green flowers form umbrella-shaped clusters 10 to 20 cm (4 to 8 in) across which produce seeds that are flat and round
- ***Poses significant threat to human health (see over for details)***

Description

Family

- Carrot/parsley family

Range & Habitat

- Disturbed land, roadsides, gardens & rural areas throughout Leeds Grenville and eastern Ontario

Height

- Up to 1.5 m (5 ft)

Flowers/Seeds

- Yellowish-green flower clusters only in 2nd year – seeds are brown, flat, round
- 10 to 20 cm (4 to 8 in) across

Leaves

- Leaves consist of 2 to 5 pairs of leaflets that grow across from each other along the stem, and one diamond-shaped leaflet on the end
- Leaflets toothed and often shaped like a mitten

Stem

- Green, 2.5 to 5 cm thick
- Smooth with few hairs

Lifecycle

- Biennial/Perennial (2-year life span)
- Reproduces through seeds in 2nd year; approx. 950 seeds/plant
- Forms seed heads late June/July (approx. 3 weeks after flower)

Origin

- Invasive



Photo: Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org



Photo: Ohio State Weed Lab Archive, The Ohio State University ontario.ca/page/wild-parsnip



Photo: Rob Routledge, Sault College, Bugwood.org

Impact

- Invades disturbed areas such as roadsides, pastures, crop land and fields with reduced tillage use.
- Biodiversity impacts; aggressively competes with native vegetation, particularly crowding out lower growing plants
- Impacts pollinators; honeybees do not generally visit parsnip
- May displace other, more pollinator-friendly plants

When Working Around Wild Parsnip

Protective clothing is critically important, including:

1. Waterproof gloves
2. Long sleeve shirts and pants
3. Eye protection
4. Whipper snippers should never be used without a hazmat suit or some other form of disposable coveralls
5. Tape coveralls at the wrist to minimize potential skin exposure to the sap



Severe burns can occur if the sap contacts the skin and is then exposed to sunlight. Symptoms can occur within 48 hours and scarring and pigmentation can last for weeks, months or sometimes years.

Keep the exposed area out of the sun for at least 48 hours. Apply sunscreen and stay inside.

Once the blisters form, there's no antidote; and should be treated the same way as a burn.

If a severe reaction does occur, you should seek treatment at a medical facility.

In Case of Exposure:

- Wash rubber gloves with soap and water before AND after removing other clothing
- Remove protective eye wear last
- Place non-disposable clothing in the laundry and wash yourself immediately with soap and water

Management of Wild Parsnip

The most crucial factor in Wild Parsnip growth management is to prevent the Wild Parsnip plants from going to seed. Every Wild Parsnip plant that is allowed to go to seed can create upwards of 950 new plants over the next four years.

Control Methods:

Hand Pulling	Root Destruction	Mowing	Burning or Compost	Herbicide
<p><i>Effective</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But, not practical for large infestations • Remove seed heads and drop into garbage bags 	<p><i>Effective</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut tap root below crown with shovel • Not practical for large infestations 	<p><i>Not Very effective</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start when flower buds begin to show (late June/early July) • Continue for 5 years • Plants will quickly re-sprout requiring multiple mowing treatments to prevent flowering 	<p>Do NOT burn or compost</p>	<p><i>Most efficient/effective for large patches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spray in early summer before seed development • Can also be sprayed in the fall

Note: Motorized tools (whipper snippers) should never be used for control of plants with photo-toxic properties as the sap can be splashed on to the operator.