



Wild Parsnip

(*Pastinaca sativa* L.)



Wild parsnip is an invasive plant in the carrot family, believed to have been introduced to North America for its edible root. Wild populations are from escaped cultivated plants.

HEALTH ALERT: Sap from the plant can burn and blister skin when exposed to UV light – phyto-photo-dermatitis. From mild burning and reddening of the skin to severe blistering and burning sensations. More like a chemical burn than an allergic reaction. Can cause blindness if sap gets into the eye.

HOW TO IDENTIFY WILD PARSNIP

A rosette of leaves in its first year, with a flowering stem reaching up to 2 meters in later years. Looks similar to Angelica, Queen Anne's Lace, and Cow Parsnip, but with yellow flowers and a distinct parsnip odour:

- **leaves** – alternate on the stem with 2 to 5 pairs of leaflets that have distinct saw toothed edges; mitten-shaped leaflets with more diamond-shaped leaf at the tip
- **stem** – thick green stem; non-woody, hollow except at nodes; grooved with few hairs
- **flowers** – yellow; small yellow flowers in large umbrella-shaped clusters, 10–20 cm across, in second year
- **seeds** – flat, winged circles
- **roots** – white to yellowish brown funnel-shaped taproot; grows to a depth of 1.5 metres
- **odour** – distinct parsnip odour



HABITAT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF WILD PARSNIP

- Forms dense stands, spreading quickly in disturbed areas, outcompeting native plants and reducing biodiversity.
- Tolerates dry, moist, and wet soils.
- Thrives in fields, meadows, riverbanks, shorelines, forest edges, roadsides, and railways.
- Reproduces by seeds only, but can regrow from root fragments left behind in soil.
- Produces a large number of seeds easily dispersed by wind and water, and on vehicles or equipment.

HOW TO REMOVE AND MANAGE WILD PARSNIP

Caution: Wear protection when working to control this plant: gloves, long sleeves, pants, goggles. DO NOT burn plants that have been cut down or dug up.

Focus on reducing or eliminating seed production while controlling first – and second year rosettes. If seeds are present remove, bag and send to municipal landfill.

In spring, before the plant flowers

Dig up as much of the root as possible. Leave to dry out in the sun. Regrowth may occur from root fragments remaining in the soil. Reduce your exposure to plant sap by using a weed pulling tool.

OR

Spot spray rosettes with dilute glyphosate solution, which is sold under the brand name Roundup. Target just the wild parsnip rosettes and spray to wet, not to the point of runoff. Follow label instructions carefully including proper personal protective equipment.

Note about pesticide use: You may use a pesticide containing glyphosate to destroy, prevent, or control an alien invasive species of plant that is poisonous to humans by touch. This includes wild parsnip. Refer to sections 3(3) and 5(3) of the Exceptions to Prohibitions on Non-essential Pesticides Regulations made under the Non-Essential Pesticides Control Act. The regulations apply to lawns and to outdoor trees, shrubs, flower, or other ornamental plants.

In early summer

Cut off flower stems. Leave to dry out in the sun. Repeat as necessary.

In fall

Remove rosettes again, by digging or spot treatment with Roundup.

Reseed areas with grass to prevent large bare areas that wild parsnip or other weeds can easily recolonize.

Contact:

Plant Protection Coordinator
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