

## Poison Hemlock in the Tri-State

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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As I've been traveling tri-state roads the past week, I've noticed a large amount of poison hemlock sprouting. As the name suggests, all parts of this plant are poisonous to both humans and animals.

Poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is a member of the carrot and parsley family. Like most of the members of this family, it is a biennial. The first year it grows as a low-lying rosette of fern-like foliage. In the spring of its second year, it shoots up to a height of three to ten feet. The stems are thick, smooth, and covered with purple spots. The flowers are small, white, and found in umbrella-shaped clusters in early summer (June and July). The seeds mature in August/September and are easily spread by mowing and agricultural equipment.

Poison hemlock may be confused with wild carrot (Queen Anne's lace) or wild cow parsnip, both of which have white umbrella-shape flower clusters. This can be very dangerous to people who harvest the thick, white tap roots, thinking they are edible. Wild carrot is fairly short and has a hairy stem, while cow parsnip has a ribbed stem. Neither have purple spotting.

Poison hemlock frequently invades disturbed sites, and is commonly found along roads, streams, trails, ditches, forest edges and waste areas. Right now, I'm seeing large amounts of the short, fern-like stage of the plant alongside county roads and in a few vacant lots that are being converted into gardens in town.

The most important way to control stands of poison hemlock is to prevent it from flowering and going to seed. This can be done by mowing alongside roads and ditches by late spring (April in southern Indiana), and repeated several times before the plants can recover and bloom (June through July).

Small patches or individual plants can be dug up and removed by hand. The alkaloids in all parts of the plant can cause moderate to severe rashes and blisters on exposed skin, so be sure to wear rubber gloves, long pants and shirts, and goggles or safety glasses. The dug-up plants should be placed in trash bags and disposed of with the regular trash.

A number of herbicides can also be used for large, wide-spread infestations. They should be applied before the second-year plants begin to bloom. The first-year rosettes

may be sprayed from mid-summer through the fall. Follow-up treatments will be needed for several years, as the seeds already in the soil begin to grow. Be sure to follow all label directions.

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Mark your calendars! The Southwest Indiana Master Gardener Association's annual plant sale will be one day only this year, on Saturday, May 7, from 8 am to 5 pm. The sale will be held at the Vanderburgh 4-H Center at 201 East Boonville-New Harmony Road in Evansville. Over 10,000 perennial and annual flowers for sun and shade gardens, as well as water plants, vegetables, herbs, and beautiful Mother's Day gifts will be available.

For more information on the plant sale, Master Gardeners, or invasive weeds, contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287.

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Poison hemlock rosette in April.



Poison hemlock stem. Notice the purple spots on the smooth stem.



Poison hemlock flower cluster

