

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 species of concern with serious human and animal health risks from ingestion or skin contact.

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.



Poison hemlock stem

Why is poison hemlock a problem?

- **Public health hazard:** Eating even a small amount of any part of this plant can kill people or animals. 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 species that establishes and spreads quickly, with a preference for disturbed site
- Out-competes native vegetation through aggressive growth and prolific seed production

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



Poison hemlock can be mistaken for edible plants in the same family (e.g. parsley or carrot).

Habitat and biology

- Prefers moist soils in sunny locations, tolerates shade and drier condition, most common along ditches, road sides, fields, unmanaged yards and disturbed sites
- 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 1,000 seeds/plant, seed production continues into winter



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 and vehicles before leaving areas where this species is present
- **Inform:** report outbreaks to the contacts listed below for support and monitoring
- **Remove:** if you have an outbreak on your property, please follow these instructions for removal
- **Dispose:** of all plant parts in the proper manner
- **Soil and gravel:** use only soil and gravel that are not contaminated with seeds and only remove soil from infested sites with a safe disposal/treatment plan in place to avoid further spread

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

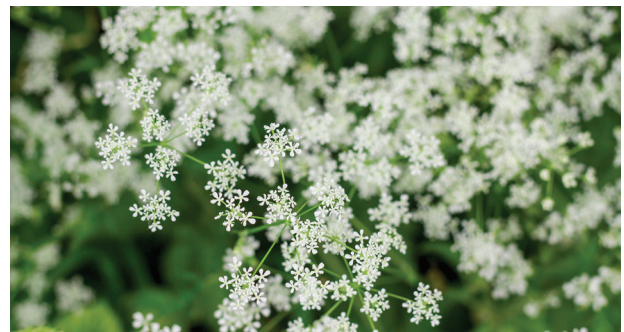
Caution

Ingestion can result in death.

Direct skin contact with this plant, or indirect contact with clothing or tools that have been in contact with the plant, may cause a sunburn-like reaction that could re-occur for years when exposed to sunlight.

For small infestations (less than 25-30 plants)

- **Caution:** Use gloves, safety glasses and protective clothing when handling, avoid any skin contact or inhaling scent. Wash all clothing and tools afterwards
- **Manual removal:** 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 3cm 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



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 provide advice
- **Do not compost!** Flowers can still form viable seeds after removal

CONTACT INFORMATION

P: 250.360.3302

E: invasive@crd.bc.ca

www.reportaweedbc.ca

www.crd.bc.ca/invasive

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