

Poison hemlock

Conium maculatum

Description

All parts of poison hemlock are poisonous.

Habit

Coarse, freely-branched biennial from a stout taproot, 0.5-3 m. tall, with purple-spotted, hollow stem.

Leaves

Large, all cauline, ternate-pinnately dissected, ultimate segments are small.

Stems

0.5-3m high, stout, erect, branched, glabrous, hollow except at the nodes, have longitudinal lines and purple markings and produce and offensive odor when damaged.

Flowers

Compound umbels numerous, rays sub-equal, 1-4 cm. long; involucre and involucre of several small, lanceolate, bracts or bractlets; calyx teeth obsolete; petals 5, white in color.





Fruits and Seeds

Stylopodium depressed-conic; fruit glabrous, broadly ovoid, 2-2.5 mm. long, with prominent, raised, wavy, almost winged ribs.

Habitat

Native to Europe, western Asia and North Africa. Found in roadsides, fields, disturbed places, clearings, banks and bluffs, shores.

Reproduction

Spread by seed dispersal; seeds can adhere to farm machinery, vehicles, agricultural produce, mud and clothing.

Similar

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), Cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*).

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Physical or chemical removal is easy, but complete eradication may be difficult due to a viable seed bank and reintroductions. Management efforts may need to be continued for several years to be effective. *Agonopterix alstroemeriana* (poison hemlock defoliating moth) is being investigated as a potential biocontrol agent along with *Trichoplusia ni*, the cabbage looper, and *Papilio poluxenes*, black swallowtail butterfly. Capable of being infected by multiple viruses, including ring spot virus, carrot thin leaf virus, alfalfa mosaic virus and celery mosaic virus. Care should be taken with handling - plant is toxic.

Credits

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