

Wild/Poison Parsnip

Wild parsnip, also called poison parsnip, contains sap that can cause a severe rash with blistering and discoloration, and may result in scarring on the skin with exposure to sunlight. The sap of the plant is dangerous and the chemical reaction is called phytophotodermatitis. Activities such as weed whacking or hand cutting can spread the sap and cause a problem. Animals can also get parsnip burns if they have little hair and lightly pigmented skin through contact or ingestion.



Description

There are two stages to wild parsnip the rosette stage and the bloom/seed stage. As a rosette, the plant is about 6 inches tall with several stalks of compound leaves with more than 5 leaflets. The plant can be in the rosette stage for one to several years. The plant then sends up a hollow flowering stem that is up to 4 feet tall with smaller leaves. Flowers are flat topped umbels 3-6 inches wide with numerous yellow flowers. Think of Queen Ann's lace flowers, which are white, and color them yellow. Usually the rosette or short stage occurs the first year from seed and the tall, flowering stage occurs the next year, flowers and sets seeds and then dies. It is their seeds that perpetuate the plant.

Ecological Threat

Wild (poison) parsnip poses a severe threat to native plants and humans. It is widespread in Charlotte and in some cases whole fields are infested with it. This plant readily moves by the numerous seeds it produces. It thrives where it is mown in the late summer and fall after it has set seed. The seeds can be spread to new sites on mowing equipment. Once populations build they can spread rapidly and displace native populations.

Management

Mowing and brush hogging: The plant must be mowed before it goes to seed, or mowing will only make the problem worse by spreading the seed. When the yellow flowers are noticed in mid-June, the mowing should be done. The plants will come back and flower again, so they will need to be mowed a second time in the same summer. Do not wait for the plant to start producing seeds before mowing, because the seeds will mature on the cut plants. This mowing will have to be done for several years to allow all the rosette stage plants to go to the flowering stage and for all the seeds on the ground to germinate (about 4 years).

Landowners can use this method to control wild parsnip in their fields. Brushing off invasive plant material from your equipment is an important step in stopping the spread.

Manually: If you have a small number of plants or if plants are mixed in with other plants you do not want to mow, pulling or cutting below the surface with a spade is effective. In this instance, plants should be severed 1-2 inches below ground level before in seed. Check again for late bolting plants. Revisit the site the next year for newly seeded plants. Place all plants in a bag and put in garbage, not compost pile.

Protect Yourself

- Wear protective clothing when working around this plant.
- Wash well after working with this plant.

Tips for Effective Control

- Cut when in flower or before the plant goes to seed.
- Cut again when plant regrows.
- Repeat this process for several years and then monitor and mow as needed.



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