

Wild Parsnip Notes

Many of our residents, and visitors to the Buck Lake area, are aware of Wild Parsnip, but for those who need some information on this invasive and dangerous plant, the following is provided.

Wild Parsnip, or Poison Parsnip, is quickly moving into our region and is now endemic to many areas around Ottawa, Leeds-Grenville, Kingston and westward to Napanee. Very large patches are now clearly visible along the 401 roadsides, especially now in July that the plant is over a meter tall and in its soft yellow bloom.

What follows is a distillation of information on this invasive and toxic plant, and there are many informative web sites on the topic, some of which I have listed below.

Wild Parsnip can be found spreading into open areas. What looks like a colourful wildflower is actually a toxic plant that could burn your skin and hurt your eyes. It grows into large patches along roadsides, abandoned fields, rail tracks and trails, and around sports fields, pastures and fence rows.

The weed resembles and is related to Queen Anne's Lace but is taller (up to 1.5 meters) and has a yellowish flower crown in contrast to Queen Anne's Lace, which has a white flower, both of which bloom in July.

A chemical compound that is released from the broken leaves and stems of Wild Parsnip can cause severe burn blisters to the skin when activated by sunlight.

Unlike poison ivy, the reaction caused by contact with wild parsnip sap is not an allergic reaction. Toxin in the sap is absorbed by the skin and then energized by ultraviolet light. The sap is most potent when the plant is in flower. Mild exposure is similar to sunburn. Severe exposure causes skin to blister.

People who come in contact with the toxic sap are prudent to avoid sunlight on the affected area and to wash exposed skin thoroughly with soap and water. Sap that gets into ones eyes is of real concern and should be rinsed immediately, and obviously medical attention should be sought for this and any serious cases.

Poison Parsnip is not generally considered to be as big a problem for pets as usually there is no contact with skin on areas exposed to sun, but caution in coming in contact with the sap that may be transported by a pet is warranted.

The simplest method of control may be to regularly cut the grass, plants and weeds in open areas where it presents before seeding begins in July, or if you wish to leave wild areas uncut, a simple regular inspection and removal by pulling or cutting the tap root (with noted cautions) will control the plant. The plant only propagates via seed.

You can remove them by digging or hand pulling, especially after a good rain or a period of drought. Be sure to wear shoes or boots, long pants, long sleeves, gloves and goggles when you are working near it and dispose of the plants by drying in location (possibly covered) or bagged and dried for a week. Thereafter the plant material should be safe to be treated as

garbage (refer to your local authority). Do not compost or burn.

The tall seed plant produces seed in the second year of growth, and with practice one can identify the first year plant for eradication.

As mentioned, the proceeding is a summary of information that is available from a number of different authorities and sources. Please refer to authorized agencies, some of which are referenced below.



Weed Info Canada web site:
good info on identification

<http://www.weedinfo.ca/en/weed-index/view/id/PAVSA>

Leeds-Grenville web site:
good info on eradication

<http://www.healthunit.org/hazards/dangerousweeds.html>

Scott Moffat Councillor City of Ottawa:
overall info and disposal procedures

<http://www.rideaugoulbourn.ca/wildparsnip/>