

## Control of Poison Hemlock

(*Conium maculatum*)

### Program Objective:

The King County Noxious Weed Control Program encourages the control of **poison hemlock** (*Conium maculatum*) in areas of the county. By stopping all seed production and eliminating existing plants, the infestation will decline as the seedbank is depleted. The once-infested areas can be re-vegetated with native plants and grasses, which can help to prevent any new weeds from establishing.

What is wrong with poison hemlock? All parts of the plant are highly toxic to humans and animals when eaten. Prolific seed production, aggressive growth habits and tolerance of shade allow poison hemlock infestations to spread rapidly. It is not useful to our wildlife as food or shelter. It crowds out desirable native, forage, crop and garden plants with its aggressive growth and prolific seed production.

Where is poison hemlock found locally? The plant grows in roadsides, along streams and rivers, ravines, fields, ditches, unmanaged yards and vacant lots. Poison hemlock prefers moist soil and sun light, but can adapt to dryer soil and shadier conditions.

### How do I identify it?

Poison hemlock is a biennial plant belonging to the parsley family standing between one and 10 feet tall. Its green leaves are fern-like, being finely divided three or four times, similar to a carrot. The stems are shiny green with purple spotting or blotching and extensive branching. The flower cluster is white with an umbrella-shaped appearance. The individual flowers are tiny and five petaled. Flowers bloom in the spring.



### How Do I control it?

The first thing to remember when controlling poison hemlock is to **avoid skin contact with the plant**. Wear gloves and long sleeves when controlling; wash your hands thoroughly after handling the plant.

#### (a) Manual Treatments:

- Plants can be dug up or cut back and removed manually. Do not compost flowers as they can easily go to seed.

#### (b) Mechanical Treatments:

- Infestation can be mowed or cut back with a weed-eater before plants flower, but before they produce seeds.
- Manual treatments will be more effective when followed by mulching and replanting the area with desirable vegetation.

#### (c) Chemical Treatments

**With any application of herbicide, always read and follow the label instructions.**

- Glyphosate** (Roundup) is an effective, but non-selective, herbicide that will also kill grasses in the area being sprayed. Established, larger leaved plants are more likely to prevent the glyphosate from contacting the understory grasses or other plants nearby. Treatment with glyphosate may need to be followed by re-seeding with grass or other vegetation appropriate to the site. Bare areas can be re-infested with poison hemlock or other weeds. Poison hemlock seedlings can be treated with spot spray or wipe applications to avoid damaging other vegetation. **2, 4-D** (Weed-B-Gon) produces noticeable damage to the plant within 3-7 days. **2, 4-D** is a selective herbicide that only acts on broadleaf plants and does not kill grasses in the area of the application. This can be helpful in controlling poison hemlock plant or seedlings that carpet the ground and in establishing a weed-free, self-sustaining plant community.

#### **For either type of Herbicide:**

- Apply to the entire leaf and stem surface of actively growing plants and do not cut the stem after applying the herbicide since this will stop the plant from absorbing the herbicide into the roots. Herbicide can be spot sprayed or wiped on if you are concerned about harming other vegetation.
- An area of heavy seedling infestation can be efficiently controlled by an herbicide application in spring, possibly followed by an application later in the summer for late sprouts.

#### (d) Biological Control

- The poison hemlock moth (*Agonopterix alstroemeriana*) is found with poison hemlock plants in quite a few areas in the state. The effectiveness of this biocontrol is not yet fully known.



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