

## AMERICAN WILD CARROT

*Daucus pusillus* Michx.

Plant Symbol = DAPU3

Contributed By: USDA NRCS Nacogdoches (TX)  
Technical Office and the National Plant Data Center



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### Alternate Names

Rattlesnakeweed, southwestern carrot, seedticks,  
rattlesnake-weed, yerba del vibora

### Uses

*Ethnobotanic:* Native Americans ate the roots raw  
and cooked (Epple 1995).

*Medicinal:* In California this species is called  
rattlesnake weed, because the herbage is reputed to  
be efficacious in the treatment of snakebites  
(Moldenke 1949). A poultice of the chewed plant  
has been applied to snakebites (Moerman 1998). A  
decoction has been used to treat colds, itches and  
fevers (Ibid.).

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State  
Department of Natural Resources for this plant's  
current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species,  
state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Description

*General:* Celery Family (Apiaceae). *Daucus pusillus*  
is a native annual found most commonly during the

early-mid part of the growing season. In most parts  
of Texas, this species has gone to seed by mid-  
summer. Rattlesnake-weed resemble their cultivated  
relative, the garden carrot. The stem is normally  
slender, from 2-4 feet in height and unbranched or  
only a single weak branch as compared to the  
introduced *Daucus carota*, which is sometimes  
heavily branched and more robust. The flower is a  
white umbel. Upon maturity, the flower cluster  
(umbel) closes to form a cup or bird's nest. The  
leaves are pinnately compound and finely cut.  
Leaflets are deeply serrated (saw-toothed). The seed  
of *Daucus carota* have fine hairs rather than the stiff  
bristles common to *Daucus pusillus*. Another  
distinguishing characteristic between the two species  
is the central flower of each individual umbellet is  
rose or purple in *Daucus carota* rather than being  
white throughout as found in *Daucus pusillus*.

American wild carrot is self-fertile. The flowers are  
hermaphrodite, having both male and female organs,  
and are pollinated by flies and bees.

A similar species is water parsnip (*Sium suave*),  
which has a corrugated main stem and leaves only  
once compound. Bishop's weed (*Ammi majus*) and  
water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*) have white umbels,  
but the leaflets are not deeply serrated or carrot like.

### Distribution

*Daucus (pusillus or carota)* is likely the most  
common and widespread plant with white umbels  
growing along Texas' roadsides. It is known from  
the U.S. West Coast and the southern half of the U.S.  
For current distribution, please consult the Plant  
Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web  
site.

### Establishment

*Adaptation:* It is very common along road right-of-  
ways. It can also become quite dominant in some  
pastures and prairies. Rattlesnake weed prefers  
moist, loamy sites, but not wet sites. The exotic,  
*Daucus carota*, tolerates a much broader site in  
Texas, ranging from blackland to rock outcrops.

American wild carrot requires moist, well-drained  
soil and prefers sandy, loamy and clay soils. It grows  
best in a sunny position and cannot tolerate shade.  
This species occurs in rocky prairies, openings in  
woodland, and rocky open, frequently limestone,

glades, and edges of bluff escarpments, sometimes along roadsides and railroads (Steyermark 1963).

*Propagation by Seed:* American wild carrot seeds are best sown in the autumn. Always aim to sow thinly and evenly to permit adequate room for the seedlings to grow and develop freely (Heuser 1997). The seeds will germinate better if they are cold stratified.

#### **Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

These plant materials are readily available from commercial sources. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

#### **References**

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