

# Parsnip Gone Wild

Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa* L.) is a non-native plant that originated in Europe. European settlers likely brought it to North America who grew it for food. Unfortunately, it has escaped cultivated gardens and spread throughout the U.S., including Vermont. Its spread across the country is likely due to the seeds being dispersed by mowing and vehicles.

Wild parsnip is a member of the carrot/parsnip family. It typically acts as a biennial (occasionally as perennial), forming a rosette of basal leaves the first year, overwintering, and then flowering the second year. Wild parsnip flowers primarily from May through July.

## Impacts of Wild Parsnip (human, animal and native plants)

- Wild parsnip produces a sap containing chemicals that can cause human skin to react in sunlight and cause second-degree sunburn, rashes and blisters.
- Wild parsnip is toxic to cattle, horses and sheep. If the animal ingests the plant, it may develop burns, rashes and blisters if in the presence of sunlight.
- Once populations of wild parsnip build, they can spread quickly and displace native plants.



## What You Can Do

- Learn how to identify wild parsnip & other invasive plants.
- Stay on trails and away from areas known to have wild parsnip & other invasive plants.
- Inspect, clean and remove mud, seeds and plant parts from clothing, pets (including horses), vehicles (including bicycles) and equipment such as mowers and tools.
- Avoid disturbing soil and removing plants from natural areas; they may be rare native plants or even invasive plants.

For more information about wild parsnip or other invasive plants in Huntington, contact the Huntington Conservation Commission.

## **Wild Parsnip Removal and Management :**

**Mow:** Roadside mowing should be done prior to seed formation (June) with follow-up mowing throughout the summer to avoid flowering and seeding out. Inconsistent mowing or a single mow late into the growing season (mid-July through August) will facilitate seed dispersal.

**Pull & Dig:** In an area with 100 plants or less, you can remove wild parsnip manually. For rosettes and small plants, pulling by hand can be an effective means of removal. Flowering plants should be severed 1-2 inches below ground level. For larger patches, use a shovel to dig out as much of the taproot as you can. Pull and dig in the spring when the soil is likely to be soft and taproot easier to remove. Follow up every few weeks to deal with regrowth or missed plants.

**Cover:** Once dug or mowed, areas can be covered with black plastic to smother new growth. Leave the plastic in place for at least one season. The area must be replanted to replace desirable plants and rehabilitate the soil.

**Dispose:** Do not burn or compost wild parsnip plants that have been cut down or dug up. If possible, leave the stems to dry out completely at the site. Carefully dispose of the plant material in black plastic bags and leave in direct sun for a week or more. Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD) encourages bringing parsnip to the composting facility, as the heat will kill the plants.

### **If you work with wild parsnip, protect yourself:**

- Avoid skin and eye contact with the sap.
- Wear long pants, long sleeves and gloves.
- Work with the plant on cloudy days or late in the day.  
If mowing, wear eye/face protection.

### **If you get sap on your skin:**

- Wash your skin thoroughly with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Wash clothes that come in contact with the sap.
- Protect the exposed skin from sunlight for at least 48 hours.



### **Sources and Resources:**

**Iowa State University Extension:** <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/icm/2007/7-9/poison.html>

**Vermont Department of Health:** <http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/outdoor/wildparsnip.aspx>

**Monroe County Invasive Species Working Group (Wisconsin):**

[http://www.co.monroe.wi.us/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/200703141405270.Invasive\\_Brochures.pdf](http://www.co.monroe.wi.us/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/200703141405270.Invasive_Brochures.pdf)