

POISON HEMLOCK



Conium maculatum

INVASIVE PLANT ALERT



One of the biggest threats to natural ecosystems in Saanich is the spread of invasive non-native plants. The District of Saanich appreciates the cooperation of all residents in removing Poison Hemlock from private property.

For assistance see contacts on reverse.

Why is Poison Hemlock a problem?

Warning: toxic to humans and animals - if any portion of the plant is ingested, seek medical attention immediately

- All parts of Poison Hemlock are extremely toxic to humans and animals
- Can cause serious illness or death if consumed. This is the famous plant that killed Socrates in 399BC
- Introduced weedy species that establishes and spreads quickly
- Out-competes native vegetation through aggressive growth and prolific seed production
- Renders croplands worthless due to acute toxicity
- Could be mistaken for edible plants in the same family (e.g. parsley)

Extremely toxic invasive plant that famously killed Socrates

What does it look like?

- Extensively branching plant 0.5-3m tall with thick hollow stems; distinctive purple blotches on hairless (smooth) stems
- Bright green triangular leaves are finely-divided and fern-like with a strong musty odour
- Small white flowers form a broad umbrella-shaped inflorescence to 0.5m across

Look for: Smooth stems with purple blotches, musty odour, large size

Could be confused with:

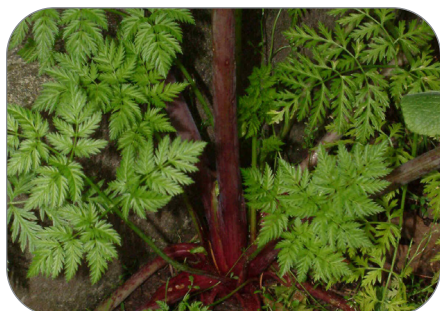
- Wild carrot or Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*): smaller plant, grows to about 1m and flowers later in summer
- Pacific hemlock-parsley (*Conioselinum pacificum*): smaller plant usually found in coastal habitats
- Other similar-looking members of the parsley family

Distribution:

- Originally from Europe, now found across Canada
- Most common in southwestern BC: lower mainland, southern Vancouver Island and in the Kootenay, Okanagan and Cariboo regions

Habitat and biology:

- Biennial plant in the Apiaceae (carrot or parsley) family
- Forms a short leafy rosette in first year; the following spring develops a tall hollow stem and several clusters of flowers develop, usually April - July
- Produces over 1000 seeds/plant; seed production continues into winter
- Prefers moist soils in a sunny location, but tolerates shade and drier conditions; most common along ditches, ravines, road sides, fields, vacant lots, unmanaged yards and disturbed sites



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What should you do?

- **Spread the word, not the plant:** don't plant Poison Hemlock or move infected soil
- **Report:** please contact Saanich (as below) to report locations and sales of infested soil
- **Remove:** If you have properly identified Poison Hemlock on your property, use the best control methods (below)
- **Clean:** stop seed spread by brushing off clothing/shoes, tires and equipment before leaving the infested area
- **Monitor:** annually return to the site (spring & fall) to continue treatment
- **Replant:** after effectively eliminating this plant, replant non-invasive plants (such as appropriate native species)

Caution: wear protective gloves and clothing when in contact with this plant. Wash all clothing and tools afterwards. (Note: all parts of this plant are poisonous)

Small Populations

- **Manual removal** is recommended, taking caution to avoid skin contact with plant materials
- Young plants can be pulled by the root in early spring when soil is moist
- Mature plants should be dug up and removed
- If unable to pull or dig, cut plant/root approximately 3 cm below ground
- In flower/seed: carefully remove and bag flower/seed heads before removal

Large Populations

- Priority: stop seed production - cut flowering stems as close to the ground as possible
- Contact Environmental Services to assist you in making a plan to treat large populations

Note: pesticide use requires a permit in Saanich

Proper Disposal

- The best option is to place all plant parts in tarps (or bags for small plants), take to Hartland Landfill and identify as invasive plants (landfill disposal, not garden waste)
- Dispose of in the Saanich Garden Waste drop off ONLY if flowers/seeds are not present
- **DO NOT COMPOST!** (and note flowers can still form viable seeds after removal)



Who do you call?

Contact Saanich for assistance and more information about Poison Hemlock, other invasive plants and volunteer opportunities.

On Public Lands:

Saanich Parks:
250-475-5522 or parcs@saanich.ca

On Private Land:

Saanich Environmental Services:
250-475-5471 or planning@saanich.ca

Other resources

Provincial Invasive Reporting

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species/reporting-invasive-species>

Capital Region Invasive Species Program

<https://www.crd.bc.ca/education/concerns/invasive-species>

King County Noxious Weed Program

www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

Saanich Native Plant List

saanich.ca/environment (tools & resources)