NOXIOUS WEED ALERT

POISON HEMLOCK

(Conium maculatum)

- Poison hemlock grows four to ten feet tall.
- The stem is branched and **hairless**, mottled with purple spots.
- The leaves are shiny green, fern-like and finely divided, with a musty smell, but **no hairs.**
- The white flowers are in umbrella-shaped heads.
- Member of the carrot family.

Photo courtesy of "Weeds of the West"

Look-a-likes:

Wild carrot (*Daucus carota*) is common on roadsides throughout Clallam County. It is smaller than poison hemlock, growing two to four feet tall, The stem is **hairy**, and does not have purple spots. The leaves smell like carrots when crushed. Wild carrot is mildly toxic to some livestock and is a Class B weed because it is very invasive in pastures.

Bur chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis*) grows in damp environments, similar to those occupied by poison hemlock. The plants are very similar, but bur chervil has a fringe of hairs where the leaf meets the main stem.

Photo by courtesy of "Weeds of the West."

Western water-hemlock (*Cicuta douglasii*) is reported to be the **most poisonous** plant in the temperate zone. It is a native plant found in moist areas along streams and ditches. For pictures and information on identifying western water hemlock, see the web page of the Noxious Weed Control Board.

Distribution:

Poison hemlock is most commonly found east of Port Angeles, especially along irrigation ditches or in other moist areas.

WHY BE CONCERNED?

- All parts of the plant are poisonous.
- The toxins are present in dried plants and decompose slowly.
- Affects livestock such as cows, horses, and pigs; pregnant animals may abort or produce offspring with birth defects.
- Poisoning in humans often occurs when the plant is confused with other, edible members of the carrot family.
- Invades pastures and riparian areas displacing native plants or valuable forage species.

Poison hemlock is a Class C weed, which has been selected for control throughout Clallam County.

Poisoning Symptoms:

- In animals, poisoning symptoms include nervous trembling, salivation, lack of coordination and dilation of the pupils. If hemlock poisoning is suspected, call a veterinarian. Livestock can be saved if only small amounts have been ingested.
- In humans, symptoms include dilation of the pupils, trembling, dizziness and slowing of the heartbeat. If a human eats poison hemlock, contact the nearest poison control center. Give the victim a tablespoon of salt in a glass of warm water to induce vomiting, and keep the person lying down, warm and quiet, until help arrives.

Ecology:

- Poison hemlock grows mainly in poorly-drained soils, often on stream or ditch banks.
- It is a biennial which usually produces a large rosette of leaves the first year and tall flowering stems the second year. After flowering and setting seed the plants die.
- It reproduces solely by seed.

CONTROL

Prevention and early detection are the best means of control.

- **Avoid** introducing soil or gravel from areas known to have poison hemlock.
- **Remove** seedlings when young because they can usually be pulled easily and they have not had an opportunity to reproduce.
- **Replant** with a desirable (preferably native) plant species, to discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly, at least bag seed heads. Do not burn plant parts. **Plant parts may not be safe for compost piles or left on site because the toxins decompose slowly, taking several years to dissipate.**

DIGGING/HANDPULLING works best when the soil is moist and with small infestations.

REPEATED MOWING will prevent seed production and weaken the plants, reducing their competitive ability. The site should be carefully monitored, however, because mowed plants can send up new stalks which need to be controlled.

WARNING: Handle plant parts carefully; small amounts of toxins may be absorbed by rubbing eyes or touching mouth after contact with plants.

HERBICIDES can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies Read the label to check that you are applying an herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount.

Weedmaster™ , (or other herbicides containing 2,4-D and dicamba) has been used effectively on poison hemlock; a surfactant will aid in effectiveness and repeated applications may be necessary. Weedmaster™ is a selective herbicide that does not harm established perennial grass when applied according to label. Roundup™ may also be used effectively, but is not selective. Poison hemlock is most susceptible when young and growing rapidly. Most herbicides will not be effective when the plant is flowering. Observe grazing restrictions because 2,4-D can make poison hemlock more attractive to livestock, but not less poisonous.

WARNING: Poison hemlock often grows close to water and any herbicide application near or over water requires a permit and a specially licensed applicator.

Prepared by the **Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board;** revised 1/2006
For more information call: **(360)-417-2442**
or see **www.clallam.net/weed**