**Invasive Plants of Iowa**

**Lacy White Flower Plants-Could They Be Invasive?**

If you have ever been riding along the highway in the summertime, you might have noticed the display of white, lacey flowers swaying in the breeze…

Most likely these are **Queen Anne’s Lace** **(*Daucus carota*)** which unfortunately, is an invasive plant in Iowa. It is native to Europe and can now be found all across the country. Queen Anne’s Lace can be found in dry meadows, roadsides, and uncultivated places. It a biennial, with second year growth 2-4 feet high. It has finely divided, feathery, matte covered, with short coarse hair leaves. The flowers are white, lacy, densely arrayed and up to 5 inches across with a single deep red “heart” blossom at the center. The seed head is cup shaped and seeds are covered with bristles which stick to passer byers, thereby spreading the plants. It is possible to irritate the skin of some people.

Some invasives are extremely poisonous such as **Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*),** also known as Spotted parsley, spotted cowbane, poison parsley, St. Bennet's herb, bad-man's oatmeal, poison root, poison snakeweed or beaver poison.  
  
It is one of the most recognized herbal botanicals in ancient medicine. Ancient populations were very aware of hemlock and its poisonous nature. Its uses ranged from curing aching joints and symptoms similar to arthritis to being used in lethal amounts to carry out the execution of prisoners. Socrates used it to commit suicide.   
  
Native to Europe, but now widely distributed across the US, especially Northern states, it can be found in dry meadows, roadsides, hiking trails, ditches, uncultivated or waste places. It’s a biennial or perennial, growing 6-10 feet tall. The first year the plant forms a large rosette and second year produces stems and flowers. It has a disagreeable, mouse-like odor. It closely resembles parsley or wild carrot, except that hemlock has no hairs on the leaves and stems. Stems are smooth, hollow, purple-mottled and it is greatly branched. It blooms June to August with white lacy clusters branching off main stem, loosely arranged. Seed head holds shape of flowers and seeds ripen in August and September. Take care not to allow any part to touch skin and do not breathe the pollen. Even dried, hemlock retains its poisonous properties.   
  
The **Giant Hogweed** (***Heracleum mantegaz-zianum*)** is related to species that are commonly found in Iowa; however giant hogweed is highly invasive and is capable of causing considerable damage to anyone who comes in contact with the plant. While giant hogweed has yet to be discovered in Iowa, populations have been found in Wisconsin. Thus it is possible that giant hogweed populations may exist in northeast Iowa.  
 It can show up anywhere but most common along roadsides, vacant lots, streams and rivers. Biennial or perennial, 8 - 20 feet tall. Some plants die after flowering, some flower for years. They can sprout late winter to early spring from roots or seed. The huge compound leaves (up to 5 feet in width), are deeply incised. Hairs on underside of leaves are stiff, dense and stubby. Large umbrella-shaped white clusters are about 2 1/2 feet in diameter, numerous small flowers making up the cluster. Blooms mid-May through July.Skin contact followed by exposure to sunlight produces painful, burning blisters that may leave purple or black scars.

**Cow Parsnip** **(*Heracleum maximum*)**, also known as Indian celery, Indian rhubarb, or pushki, is the only member of the genus [*Heracleum*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heracleum_(plant)) native to [North America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_America). At this time it is not considered an invasive in Iowa. Cow parsnip is a tall [herb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herb), reaching heights of over 7 ft. The genus name Heracleum (from "Hercules") refers to the very large size of all parts of these plants. Cow Parsnip has the characteristic flower [umbels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umbel) of the carrot family ([Apiaceae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apiaceae)), which are 8 inches across, may be flat-topped or rounded, and are always white. They bloom in May and can be found in meadows, along streams and roadsides. It has a nice flower for arrangements. Its sap can also cause irritation to the skin and can sensitize the skin to sunburn (phototoxicity).

When it comes to the lacy white flowers, know your plants! It is best not to touch any of these plants unless you can positively identify them. Since photos would be in black and white for this publication, please check the plants out at the Iowa State Extension website listed below.

References:

*The Wild Garden* <http://www.nwplants.com/information/white_flowers/white_comparison.html>  
Io*wa State Extension* <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2008/0511MikeOwen.htm> (good color images of plants in this article)  
*Stevens County Noxious Weed Board*  
[*http://www.nwplants.com/information/white\_flowers/white\_comparison.html*](http://www.nwplants.com/information/white_flowers/white_comparison.html) *New York State Department of Environmental Conservation*  
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/72766.html>  
*Wild Things*  
<http://www.slate.com/blogs/wild_things/2014/08/21/poisonous_plants_socrates_drank_hemlock_tea_as_his_preferred_mode_of_execution.html>  
  
Czarapata, Elizabeth, 2005, *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest*Kaufman, Sylvan Ramsey and Kaufman, Wallace, 2012*, Invasive Plants, Second Edition, Revised and Updated.*

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