



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

### **Hardin County Extension News Release**

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## **Beware of Poison Hemlock**

*Hardin County* – A call was made to the Hardin County Extension office about a noxious weed that is growing in the county that people need to know about. The weed, Poison Hemlock, looks similar to Wild Carrot or Wild Parsnip. All parts of the plant are poisonous including the leaves, stems, seeds, and roots. Simply handling the plant seldom causes a toxic reaction in humans, but ingesting it through the eyes, open wounds, or orally causes poisoning.

The definition of “noxious weed” means any plant designated a prohibited noxious weed by the Director of Agriculture. Noxious Weeds are problematic weeds. They possess one or more of the following attributes: aggressive competition with cultivated plants, toxicity to livestock, natural habitat degradation, resistant to herbicides, or threat to public health, safety, or navigation. The federal Noxious Weed Law of 1974 controls the importation of weed species into the United States. Most states, counties, and municipalities have their own noxious weed laws as well. There are 20 weeds on Ohio’s Noxious Weed List.

According to Stan Smith, Program Assistant, OSU Extension-Fairfield County, in recent years Poison Hemlock seems to have become widespread throughout many Ohio counties. “Perhaps we are seeing it spread most quickly in road and other right-of-ways that are difficult to mow and seldom ever sprayed with a herbicide.” Poison Hemlock is a biennial member of the carrot family – *Conium maculatum* – which can cause respiratory failure and even death when ingested by livestock or humans. Poison Hemlock’s most famous claim to fame was when it was used to execute Socrates in 329 B.C. It’s a non-native invasive that may at times be confused with Giant Hogweed – *Heracleum mantegazzianum* – a

plant with many similarities and also spreading in parts of Ohio.

In fertile soils Poison Hemlock may easily grow up to 10 or 12 feet, producing small white flowers that are typical of the carrot family. The plant began flowering around Ohio a few weeks ago. The herb has a smooth, purple-spotted stem; dark, glossy bluish-green fern-like triangular leaves. It has a fleshy white taproot. Both the leaves and roots have a disagreeable parsnip-like odor.

The taste of the leaves and seeds of Poison Hemlock are unpleasant to livestock, so toxic quantities are seldom consumed when ample desirable feed is available for the animals. Cattle can usually survive poison hemlock if consumed in amounts less than 0.4% of their body weight (4 to 5 pounds for mature cows) although abortions are possible at lower rates. The toxicity of the plant changes little if fermented with silage or dried in hay.

Being a biennial, Poison Hemlock is most easily controlled late in the fall after emergence. Crossbow, Banvel, and 2,4-D are fairly effective on small Poison Hemlock even in the spring. Taller plants may need to be controlled with glyphosate. Mowing after the plants have bolted and before seed set will prevent seed production.

*This article was written by Stan Smith, Program Assistant, OSU Extension-Fairfield County, and revised by Mark Badertscher, Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator, OSU Extension-Hardin County.*