

# Water Hemlock

With the decreased yield farmers are seeing in their hay fields and drying out of some low areas Water Hemlock becomes a problem. When you are haying low lying areas it is always a good idea to scout for Water Hemlock and if you find some either avoid haying in that area or get rid of the plant before you cut. Water Hemlock grows in abundance in the County of St. Paul and can easily be found when you know what to look for.

Water Hemlock is a highly toxic, native member of the Parsnip family. It grows mainly in wet or moist areas such as sloughs, wet meadows, and along streambanks. It is poisonous to all livestock and to humans, and the toxin affects the system so quickly that treatment is usually not possible.

The toxin (cirutoxin) is concentrated mainly in the horizontal chambers of the root bulb, but it is present throughout the leaves and stem as well. The consumption of .1% of body weight of the green material (stems and leaves) is lethal. The toxin content in a single bulb (root) is enough to kill a large animal. Animals may also be poisoned if Water Hemlock is plowed under or if ground is reclaimed since this may expose the root. Toxicity decreases through the growing season and the toxicity of above-ground parts may be negligible when dry. The roots are toxic at all times even when dry. This makes bailing dangerous because as mentioned above if only a small part of the root gets bailed it could easily kill livestock when they feed on it.

There are many plants that look similar to Water Hemlock. In the County of St. Paul 4 very common look-alikes are Water Parsnip, Cow Parsnip, Common Yarrow and Field Caraway.

Herbicide control of Water Hemlock is difficult as it grows mainly in wet areas. A mechanical control method that is effective is digging up the plant (taking care not to touch any part of the plant with bare skin), bagging it and destroying it.

For further information regarding Water Hemlock, please contact the County of St. Paul Agricultural Service Board at (780)-645-3006.

Cow Parsnip is usually taller than all of the plants listed and has a very distinctive shaped leaf that makes it easily distinguishable from the other four plants.



Common Yarrow also has very distinct fern like leaves and it is often found in drier areas and is a lot smaller plant than Water Hemlock .



Common Yarrow also has very distinct leaves that grow singly and directly from the main stem.



Water Parsnip is the hardest to distinguish from Water Hemlock because it looks similar and it tends to grow in the same places.

Water Hemlock notice the red/purple stem.



Water Parsnip notice the green stem.



Common Yarrow leaf on the Right, Water Parsnip in the middle and Water Hemlock on the left.



Water Parsnip on the left with all leaves growing from the stem and Water Hemlock on the right with 'secondary stems' growing from the main stem.



Water Parsnip with an 'octagonal' type stem.



Water Hemlock with a round stem.

