

Poison hemlock is a dangerous plant often found along stream banks, in fields, near fences, and on roadsides. Eating even a small amount of any part of this plant can kill people, livestock, and wildlife.

The hemlock plant has white flowers that grow in clusters, and the stem has purple spots. This plant can grow up to 9 feet tall. Leaves are fern-like and bright green, with a musty smell.

All parts of the plant are poisonous, including the flowers, leaves, stems, roots, and seeds. Even the dead canes remain toxic for up to three years. A single poison hemlock plant can produce over 40,000 seeds. These seeds can adhere to farm machinery, vehicles, fur and clothing, as well as be carried by water, and to a limited extent, wind. Poison hemlock is capable of rapid establishment, particularly in disturbed sites.

It contains potent toxic alkaloids that affect the nervous system, and even small internal doses can cause respiratory collapse and death. It can also cause a severe skin reaction similar to a burn when touched externally. '

Poison hemlock can be mixed in with harmless plants in pastures and crops, making this plant particularly dangerous to livestock. However, its unpleasant, musty odor usually causes animals to avoid it unless there is no other foliage or feed available to eat.

When removing this hemlock, always wear rubber gloves and protective clothing when pulling the plant. Place the plant into a plastic bag and dispose of it into the trash. **PLEASE DO NOT BRING POISON HEMLOCK TO COMPOSTING FACILITY** – the dried plants remain toxic.



Image courtesy K. Chayka