

Safe and Healthy Workplace Wild Parsnip

bulletin

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Don't touch wild parsnip!

Wild parsnip occurs throughout Ontario in abandoned yards, waste places, meadows, old fields, roadsides and railway embankments. It is a member of the carrot family and is very similar to the cultivated parsnip. It is also related to giant hogweed and has similar effects. Wild parsnip is distinguished from other members of the carrot family by its compound leaves with broad, sometimes coarsely-lobed leaflets, yellow flowers and distinctive odour.

In its first year, wild parsnip grows in the form of rosettes. These grow close to the ground with leaves averaging six inches long. When wild parsnip matures, its flower stalks grow to about 4 feet high and have umbrella like clusters of yellow flowers that form large flat seeds. Leaves are compound and have 5-15 oval leaflets with variable toothed edges and deep lobes.

Wild parsnip rosettes are among the first plants to become green in spring, and its flowers turn a prominent yellow in midsummer. After flowering and seeding, plants die and turn brown in fall, but first year rosettes remain green until frost.



rosette



mature plant



Employee Health, Safety and Wellness

Harmful effects

After handling the fruit, flowers or leaves of wild parsnip, humans can develop dermatitis. Aided by sunlight, chemicals in the plant cause inflammation of the skin. Mild cases cause burning sensations and reddening of the skin. Severe cases can lead to blistering and extreme burning sensations. Wild parsnip reactions often appear as long spots or streaks on the skin and are commonly confused with the effects of poison-ivy. Unlike poison ivy, you don't need to be sensitized by a prior exposure. Wild parsnip causes a non-allergic photo-dermatitis that can occur in anyone with the right combination of plant sap and sunlight.



Precautions

Outdoor workers should become familiar with the wild parsnip plant and know it by sight. Being able to readily identify wild parsnip and early detection of infested areas will minimize inadvertent exposure to this plant and the painful results that follow. A useful web-site for weed identification is www.weedinfo.ca/.

- Never touch or brush up against the plant with bare skin.
- If you must work near the plant, cover all body parts using impermeable coveralls and boots, rubber gloves, and a face shield to protect the eyes and face.
- Thoroughly wash boots and gloves with soap, water and a scrub brush before taking off your protective clothing.

- Avoid using power tools near the plant because breaking or crushing the stem or leaves can release the toxic sap.
- Avoid burning wild parsnip where possible. If burning must take place, avoid the smoke and wear appropriate personal protective equipment.
- The only person that should cut or attempt to control wild parsnip is someone who knows
 - the hazards
 - what controls will prevent contact
 - how to prevent further spread of the plant

What to do if exposed

- Wash the affected area immediately with soap and water.
- Stay out of sunlight and cover up exposed areas.
- Get medical attention immediately.

This bulletin provides general information on wild parsnip for OPS employees required to work outdoors. Employees are encouraged to speak with their manager and may contact the Centre for Employee Health, Safety and Wellness if they have concerns. This material is for information purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice from your physician or a local public health unit.

Note: The information provided in this bulletin is derived from documents prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs and other sources. For further information, see:

[Ontario Weeds – Wild Parsnip](#) - OMAFRA

[Identifying Wild Parsnip](#) – OMAFRA

[Wild Parsnip, *Pastinaca sativa*](#) – weedinfo.ca

[Notes on Poisoning – Wild Parsnip](#) – Canadian Biodiversity Information Facility

[Environmental Health - Dangerous Weeds](#) - Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit

[Wild parsnip \(*Pastinaca sativa*\)](#) - Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources