

Himalayan pokeweed

Phytolacca acinosa

Identification:

Phytolaccaceae (Pokeweed family)

Uncommon Perennial forb

Height: 3-5'

Width: 2.5-5'

Leaf Arrangement: alternate

Flower: Cream, Pink, Green

Blooms: Mid-summer

Fruit: Black berry

Fall Color: n/a

Himalayan pokeweed is a large perennial plant. Its striking for its size, which make it look almost like a shrub by early summer. Leaves are large, up to 10" long, and oval-shaped, with unserrated margins and a slight point at the tip. Stems tend to be upright, or spreading at no more than a 45° angle.

Flowers bloom from early to mid summer. They are on vertical stalks (called peduncles), blooming sequentially with the lower flowers blooming before the flowers nearer the top of the stalk. The flowers themselves have five creamy-white petals, a green center and five pale pink anthers.

The as the fruits mature the peduncles change in color from a pale green to a bright magenta. Fruit are a black berry with deeply divided carpels, each carpel having an elongated extension or hook at the tip.

Himalayan pokeweed may be confused with American pokeweed, which is native to our region but also spreading rapidly due to human-cased changes to the ecosystem. American pokeweed can be differentiated from Himalayan pokeweed by its sprawling, spreading structure, its flower stalks are never vertical, instead spreading at an angle or horizontally, and as the fruit develop the berry clusters tend to droop downward. The berries themselves have a smooth surface, with just some wrinkling at the bottom to indicate the division between the carpels.



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Phytolacca acinosa

AKA: Indian pokeweed



Description & Impact:

Himalayan or Indian pokeweed (*P. acinosa*) has been introduced to our region more recently as an ornamental plant. This species appears to be in the early stages of becoming invasive, and should be eradicated wherever it is found. Despite being relatively rare in cultivation, it can be found in shaded borders and natural woodlands, sometimes far from any cultivated plants.

The bright magenta stems of this plant are attractive to birds. While the berries are eaten and thus distributed by birds, all parts of this plant are toxic to humans including the berries.

Control Methods:

Organic: Pokeweed forms a large, deep taproot from which it can resprout if cut or only the upper portion of the root is removed. However, if removed when they are still small plants digging them out is effective. For larger colonies, repeated mowing 2-3 times per year for 2-3 years would probably be needed for permanent control.

Chemical: Cutting the pokeweed down and applying concentrated herbicide to the stem in the cut stump application is effective and will result in the least collateral damage to neighboring plants. A foliar spray application will also be effective, and may be the only practical method for large monocultures, but due to the large size of these plants over-spray on other plants and exposure to the individual applying the herbicide are likely. Glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) works well, or try triclopyr (Garlon®, etc.), a broadleaf specific herbicide, when you want to avoid harming neighboring grasses or sedges.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Citations: