

Weed Information Sheet:

wild parsnip

Pastinaca sativa

Identification:

Apiaceae (Carrot family)

Abundant Biennial forb

Height: 30-60" **Width:** 18-30"

Leaf Arrangement: alternate

Flower: Yellow

Blooms: Early summer to Mid-

Fruit: ovular

Fall Color: n/a

Wild Parsnip forms a low-growing rosette in its first year. In its second year of life it shoots up to 5' in height with multiple, large (up to 6" across) yellow, flat-topped umbel flower heads.

Wild parsnip is very similar in appearance to the native golden alexanders (*Zizia aurea*). Golden alexanders are common in the wild as well as in prairie seed mixes and planting, so differentiating the two species is critical. Wild parsnip blooms later and is larger than golden alexanders, but there can be some overlap between the two. The best way to tell them apart is to count the number of leaflets. Wild parsnip always has 7 or more leaflets on its basal leaves (though leaves on upper stem may be composed of fewer leaflets), arranged along a single central stalk (pinnately compound). Golden Alexanders has 3 to 5 leaflets per leaf, spreading in three directions with three leaflets per branch (petiole) (a bipinnately compound pattern.)



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NR-40 Restricted

AKA: n/a

Description & Impact:

Wild parsnip is a biennial or short-lived perennial species which can cause second-degree chemical burns upon contact. The sap of wild parsnip is phototoxic, meaning when comes in-contact with skin, and is also exposed to sunlight (UV-light specifically), it cause burns in the form of reddened skin and painful blisters. Upon healing the burned area forms a scar that may persist for several months to years (but is usually temporary). This European member of the carrot family was likely imported as a food crop, however cultivated varieties have had the photo-toxic compounds bred out of them. Wild parsnip is an abundant weed and spreads rapidly on roadsides and common in prairies, savannas, old fields, railroad embankments, and many other weedy, sunny places.

Control Methods:

It is critical to wear gloves, long sleeves and long pants when handling this species. Sunscreen should be applied to any exposed skin (face, neck, etc.), but is not a suitable substitute for protective clothing. Consider working on controlling this species in the hour before and after sunset to limit UV exposure.

Herbicides are most effective on rosettes, in mid-spring, or shortly after a burn when they are still small and many native plants are still dormant. A spot application of glyphosate (Round-Up®) is effective, or to reduce collateral damage choose a triclopyr-based herbicide (Garlon® 3A) which is more selective and will not kill grasses. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply herbicide according to the product label.

Manual: Cutting the root about 2” below the surface with a sharp shovel or “Parsnip Predator” is the preferred method for controlling small populations. Hand pulling is effective only in moist or loose soils and is generally not recommended. Manual control is easiest after parsnip bolts but before it flowers. Once flowering has begun they can produce seeds even if you kill the plant. So plants must be removed from the site and disposed of properly if they have begun to flower.

Mowing is most efficient on large populations. They should be mown when the plants first begin to flower in mid-June. This first mowing should be done as high as possible. Repeated mowings will be needed for control as the plants attempt to flower again, usually 2-3 times, until root energy reserves are exhausted.

Citations: