

WILD PARSNIP

Pastinaca sativa

Caution: Do not touch this plant!

What is wild parsnip?

Wild parsnip is an invasive plant from Europe and Asia that has become naturalized in North America. It is well suited for colonizing disturbed areas but can also be found in open fields and lawns. Wild parsnip sap can cause painful, localized burning and blistering of the skin.

Identification

Wild parsnip can grow up to 5' tall and has hollow, grooved stems that are hairless. Leaves resemble large celery leaves. They are yellow-green, coarsely toothed and compound, with 3-5 leaflets. Small, yellow flowers are clustered together in a flat-topped array approximately 3-8" across. Flowering usually occurs during the second year of growth, starting in May or June and lasting for 1-2 months. Seeds are flat, brown, and slightly winged to facilitate wind dispersal in the fall.



Wild parsnip infestation



Wild parsnip stem



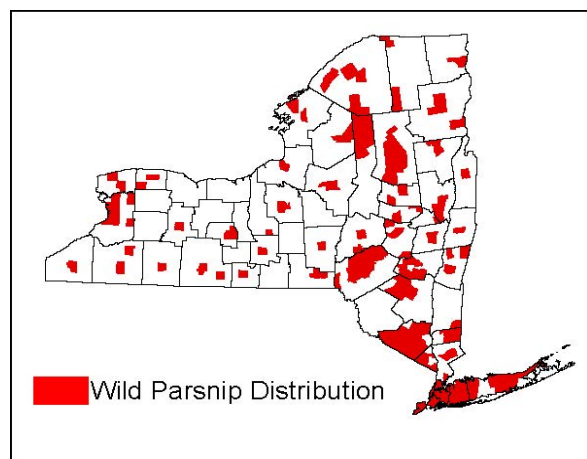
Wild parsnip leaf



Wild parsnip flower cluster and seeds
Seed Photo: Bruce Ackley, Bugwood.org

Where is wild parsnip located?

Wild parsnip can be found growing in a broad range of habitats, especially along roadsides, in fields and in pastures. It is common in the United States and Canada and is widespread in New York. The map on the right reflects only what has been positively identified and reported; it significantly under represents the presence of wild parsnip in the state. DEC encourages the public to report sightings of this invasive plant to iMapInvasives (see below).



Why is wild parsnip dangerous?

Wild parsnip sap contains chemicals called furanocoumarins which can make skin more vulnerable to ultraviolet radiation. Brushing against or breaking the plant releases sap that, combined with sunlight, can cause a severe burn within 24 to 48 hours. This reaction, known as phytophotodermatitis, can also cause discoloration of the skin and increased sensitivity to sunlight that may last for years.

How to protect yourself from wild parsnip:

- Learn to identify wild parsnip at different life stages.
- Do not touch any parts of the plant with bare skin.
- Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, pants, boots and eye protection if working near wild parsnip to prevent skin contact with the sap. Synthetic, water-resistant materials are recommended.

If contact with sap occurs...

- Wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water, and keep it covered for at least 48 hours to prevent a reaction.
- If a reaction occurs, keep the affected area out of sunlight to prevent further burning or discoloration, and see a physician.



Burns from wild parsnip
Photo: Andrew Link, Lacrosse Tribune 2013

What can be done about wild parsnip?

Prevent establishment and spread

It is important to remove new infestations while they are still small and not well established. When using equipment where wild parsnip is present, make sure to clean it thoroughly before using it again in an area that is parsnip-free. Avoid areas where seed is present to prevent its accidental spread on clothing and equipment.

Control and management

Manual removal of plants can be effective for small areas. Cutting roots 1-2" below the soil or pulling plants by hand should be done before they have gone to seed. If removing plants after seeds have already developed, cut off the seed heads and put them in plastic bags. Leave the bags out in the sun for one week to kill the seed heads before disposal. Mowing wild parsnip after flowers have bloomed but before seeds have developed can kill the plants. Some plants may re-sprout, making it necessary to mow the area again. General herbicides can be applied as spot treatments to new shoots.

Report an infestation

If you believe you have found wild parsnip...

- Take a picture of the entire plant and close-ups of the leaf, flower and/or seed.
- Note the location (intersecting roads, landmarks or GPS coordinates).
- Report the infestation to iMapInvasives at www.NYiMapInvasives.org.

For more information, contact DEC Forest Health (see below) or your local Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) by visiting www.nyis.info.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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