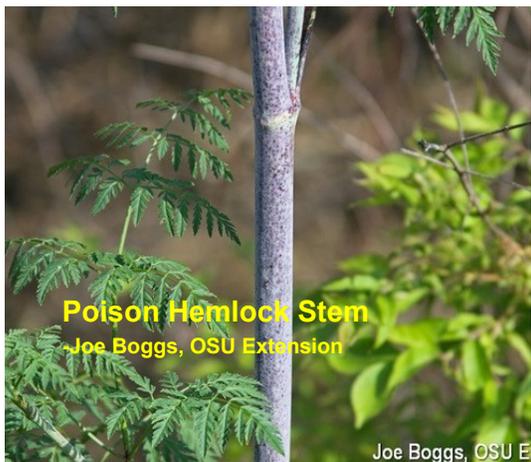




Invasive Species

The purpose of this newsletter is to raise awareness of invasive species and the harm they can do to an environment, including making it very difficult for native plants to flourish. The “Friends of the Woods” volunteer group has been removing invasive plant species such as garlic mustard, multiflora rose, and barberry throughout the Knox County Parks. They also have begun to make improvements to the Honey Run Waterfall area by implementing a restoration area within the park, and hope to inaugurate similar projects in other parks.



Poison Hemlock Gaining Ground in Knox County

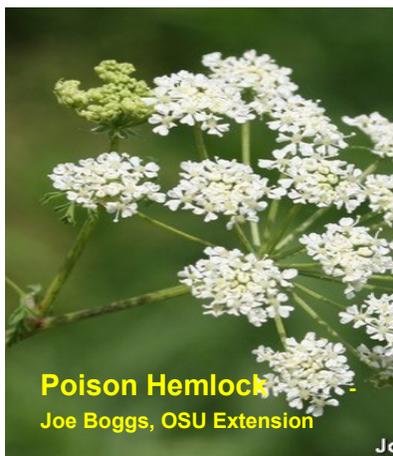
By: Sue Hagan

Rarely does a plant strike fear into people’s hearts. Some plants can be annoying, yes, like poison ivy with its itchy blisters left behind after contact. But generally, annoying plant species, many of them invasive, do more damage to our environment than they do to us humans.

Poison hemlock is an exception, and though the Friends of the Woods members are pretty fearless, we’re not tackling a large-scale removal of this noxious plant. We DO wish to educate people though, and talk about the differences between poison hemlock, Queen Anne’s lace, and giant hogweed. We also know it CAN be removed, but great care must be taken to avoid getting sap on or in your body.

Non-native to North America, poison hemlock is one of the deadliest plants on Earth. It’s piperidine alkaloid compounds cause respiratory failure in mammals; in fact, it’s the plant that was used to kill Socrates in 399 BC. Poison hemlock has been in Ohio for a number of years, showing up first in southern Ohio and gradually moving throughout the state. It’s easily spread by wind, water, mowing and birds and is prevalent along woodland edges, in ditches and along roadways.

Once you know what to look for, poison hemlock is easily



recognizable. It can be confused with Queen Anne’s lace, because of the umbrella-shaped white flowers that top the multi-branched stem. Both also are members of the carrot family. The similarity ends there, however. Queen Anne’s lace has a slender stem, covered in fine hairs, and it stands one to four feet tall. Poison hemlock can stand 10 feet tall and its sturdy main stem is covered in purple blotches and is hairless. Knox County and Knox County Parks have both species in abundance.

Giant hogweed is another noxious non-native plant that is showing up in Ohio, but is not nearly as prevalent as poison hemlock. It, too, has an umbrella shaped flower atop its stem, but it can stand as tall as 15 feet. It’s deeply lobed leaves can be five feet across, and are dissimilar from the fern-like poison hemlock leaves. While giant hogweed also has purple blotches on its stem, the stem is covered in prominent, course white hairs. Giant hogweed has not yet infiltrated Knox County, but experts say it will move into the county eventually.

Back to poison hemlock, which is becoming more and more widespread in Ohio. It has a two-year life cycle, showing as a fern-like rosette it’s first year. The second year, the rosette “bolts” upward, forming flowers that go to seed. The plant then dies back, and the seeds start the cycle over again.

The time to remove the plant is before it goes to seed. Because of its toxicity, people should wear protective clothing and goggles before cutting it. Also, string trimmers should not be used, because they will fling the open stems and sap around. (Contrary to popular belief, the sap does not cause skin to blister. But accidentally rubbing sap into your eyes or mouth will cause poisoning.)

Poison hemlock also responds to Roundup, which can be effective in controlling the plant in areas where desirable plants won’t be damaged.

The Friends of the Woods volunteers continually keep an eye out for poison hemlock, wild parsnip, and other noxious plants. And we safely remove them when possible, while continuing to concentrate our efforts on garlic mustard, multi-flora rose, barberry and other non-toxic invasive plants.

Please refer to the links below for more information.

<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ohionoxiousweeds/chapter/poison-hemlock/>

[Giant hogweed – Identifying Noxious Weeds of Ohio \(pressbooks.pub\)](#)

[Poison Hemlock Control | Agronomic Crops Network \(osu.edu\)](#)