

# “B” Rated Weeds

A weed of economic importance which is regionally abundant,  
but may have limited distribution in some counties

**Poison hemlock**  
*Conium maculatum*

**Other common names:** Carrot fern, poison  
parsley, spotted hemlock

**USDA symbol:** COMA2  
**ODA rating:** B



**Introduction:** Poison hemlock is a native of Europe, North Africa, and Asia. It was brought in to the United States as a garden plant sometime in the 1800s. It is highly adaptable to a wide range of climates as long as sufficient growing season moisture is available. The first documented site of poison hemlock in Oregon was in 1919 in Multnomah County. It is known as the plant that poisoned Socrates.

**Distribution in Oregon:** Poison hemlock can be found in every county in Oregon.

**Description:** Poison hemlock is a biennial member of the carrot family, growing from 3 to 7 feet tall on a deep taproot. Hollow stems are erect with leaves that are alternate, one per node, petioled, and pinnately divided. Flowers are white in compound stemmed umbels, much like little umbrellas. Poison hemlock reproduces only by seeds; dispersed by water, wind, on animal fur, human clothing, boots, and machinery.

**Impacts:** Poison hemlock thrives in pastures, along streams, and irrigation ditches and in non-crop areas. Poor pasture management may lead to contaminated hay and forage. Several livestock deaths are attributed each year to this species. Wildlife such as elk is also susceptible to the toxins in poison hemlock though they avoid eating it. Poison hemlock is considered to be one of the most poisonous plants in North America. All parts of the plant are poisonous especially the root and root crown. An extract from the plant was used to execute Socrates in ancient Greece. It is recommended that gloves be worn when handling the plant, as some people develop dermatitis when contacting the sap. Children should be monitored when in areas containing poison hemlock.

**Biological controls:** A small Agonopterix moth frequently defoliates hemlock patches, unfortunately its impact is sporadic from year to year.

