

Crop Production

Wild parsnip gone wild



By MIKE RANKIN

WILD parsnip could be Exhibit 1 in the case for a new invasive species rule in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the new legislation now being proposed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will come too late to eradicate wild parsnip from our roadsides, pastures, grasslands and wildlife areas.

This yellow-flowered weed, which not too many years ago was hard to find in many areas of Wisconsin, now dominates a significant amount of the state's nondisturbed areas. What's unfortunate is that wild parsnip is an easy weed to control.

If you're not familiar with wild parsnip, think of wild carrot — also known as Queen Anne's Lace — with a yellow flower. Wild parsnip generally grows 2 to 4 feet tall and is a biennial or monocarpic perennial. Once seeds germinate, the initial rosette plants must reach a critical size before the plants shoot a stalk and flower. The time be-

tween seed germination and flowering ranges from two to four years. All plants must go through at least one winter before flowering takes place (usually during July) and the plant dies.

Pesky weed

Wild parsnip is a problem on several fronts. Once established in the absence of any control measures, it can dominate a plant community.

Further, there is a serious health hazard associated with wild parsnip. This weed can cause phyto dermatitis to the skin. If plant juices come in contact with human skin in the presence of sunlight, a rash and/or blistering can occur that will make poison ivy seem like a mosquito bite. All people are susceptible, and the skin discoloration may last for up to several months.

As mentioned previously, wild parsnip is relatively easy to control with vigilant mowing or just old-fashioned pulling — wearing gloves and protective clothing — to prevent seed production and dispersal. A timely herbicide application (2,4-D or dicamba) in the fall will virtually eradicate young plants in the rosette stage. One landowner indicated they were able to eliminate a rather heavy pasture infestation with intensive animal grazing.

Why has wild parsnip become such a problem even though it is so easy to

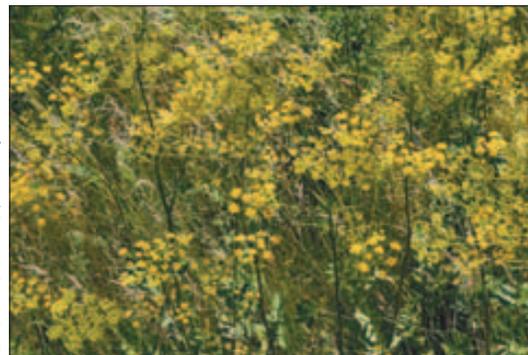
control? Likely it's because in our quest to preserve wildlife and delay summer mowing of nondisturbed areas, wild parsnip has had ample time to produce viable seed.

We are past the time when private landowners, local towns, counties and federal agencies need to take inventory and initiate an effective control program. Perhaps the aforementioned proposed Invasive Species Rule will help in this regard.

Controversial rule

It's been a long time since the Wisconsin Prohibited Weed rules have undergone a major revision. That's not to say there hasn't been much discussion and debate over making changes. To be sure, this rule comes with controversy, as what seems invasive to one entity may be viewed as a useful plant to another. For example, is reed canarygrass a valuable grazing and hay forage crop or a devastating wetland species? It depends who you ask.

The new proposed rule will divide known and potential invasive plants into several categories: prohibited, re-



DANGEROUS WEED: Wild parsnip is a serious health hazard. If the plant's juices touch human skin in the presence of sunlight, a rash and/or blistering can occur.

stricted, caution, nonrestricted and pending. Specifically, the rules will set restrictions on actions such as sales, transporting and releasing certain species to the wild without a permit, and will allow the DNR to work with local units of government and landowners to quickly contain new plant infestations likely to become problematic.

Details on the current proposal can be viewed on the DNR Web site, dnr.wi.gov/invasives/classification.

Regardless of how or when the new rule takes shape, it's still private and public landowners' obligation to know and control invasive plants. We only need to look at the wild parsnip example to see the consequences resulting from a lack of action.

Rankin is the Fond du Lac County Extension crops and soils agent.

Heads up for power lines

When working outdoors this fall, keep an eye to the sky.

Stay clear of power lines. Your safety — and the safety of those who work with you — depends on it. Here are a few tips to keep in mind during harvest time:

- Stay at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines when operating tall equipment or using an auger, pole or ladder.
- When filling grain bins, maintain at least an 18 foot vertical clearance from the highest point of the bin to the nearest power line.
- Don't trim trees near power lines yourself. Call a professional arborist.
- If your vehicle comes in contact with a power line, stay inside until help arrives unless there is immediate danger of a vehicle fire. You should jump out of the vehicle, with both feet together and avoid touching the vehicle, then shuffle away from the vehicle and downed wires without raising your feet.

For more tips on outdoor electrical safety, call 1-866-ALLIANT (255-4268) or go to www.alliantenergy.com/agsafety.



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