

WATER HEMLOCK

AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

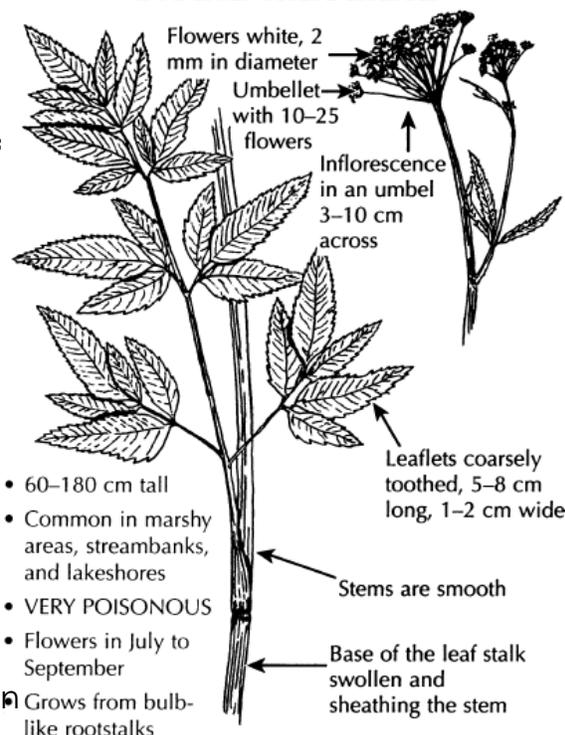
https://vermilion-river.com/living_here/ag_and_environment/agriculture/ag_weeds_pests_diseases.html

The wet springs over the past couple of years have increased sightings of native plants from the carrot or parsley family growing along streams and wetlands. Unfortunately this family of plants includes western water hemlock – one of the most poisonous plants in Canada. Western water hemlock is a native plant typically found in sporadic locations along streams, wetlands and near dugouts. It prefers open areas where it is not shaded by taller plants. Recently, increased amounts of water hemlock have been found in the County, as well as across Alberta. In drier springs, the plants will again become much less common. Unfortunately western water hemlock is poisonous to all livestock and to humans. One root bulb can quickly kill a mature cow.

IDENTIFICATION OF WATER HEMLOCK

Accurate identification is critical because water hemlock is a native plant and has several less to non-toxic relatives which are commonly found in wetlands. **Western water hemlock has narrow leaves with sharply toothed margins. The flowers are small, white and in umbrella-like clusters. The root of water hemlock is bulbous, and contains an oily sap.** Look alike plants include water parsnip, which has similar leaves and flowers, but lacks the toothed margins on the leaves and the bulbous root. Water parsnip rarely causes poisoning. Cow parsnip is a very common wetland plant in the County, and is related to water hemlock but grows larger and has very large leaves. Cow parsnip is non-toxic. (It is also often mistaken for giant hogweed).

Water Hemlock *Cicuta maculata*



- 60–180 cm tall
- Common in marshy areas, streambanks, and lakeshores
- **VERY POISONOUS**
- Flowers in July to September
- Grows from bulb-like rootstalks

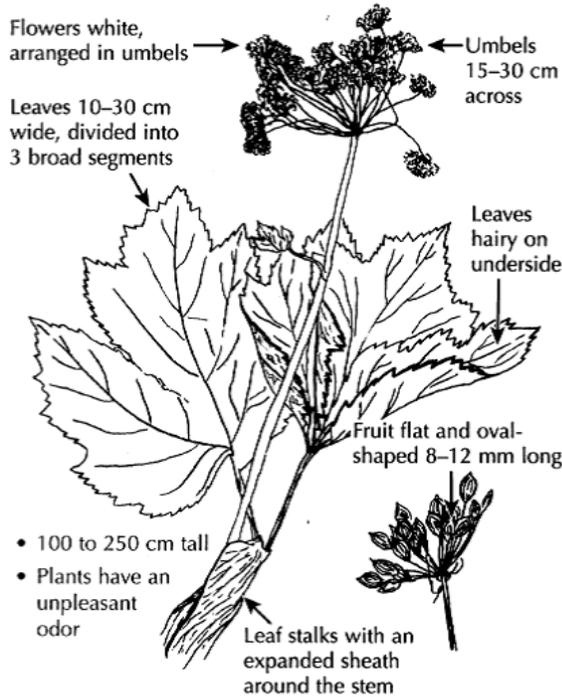
QUICK FACTS:

- Poisoning by western water hemlock is rapid – often the animal is found dead in the wetland. Your vet should rule out other causes of sudden death such as blue-green algae poisoning, anthrax, blackleg or bloat.
- Control involves manual removal of the plants. Pull plants, trying to remove the root as well as above-ground stems. Bag and remove. **WEAR GLOVES and SAFETY GLASSES** as the plants are poisonous. Don't break or cut the roots.
- Another alternative for water hemlock control to consider is fencing out the wetland. The County's ALUS program may be able to help you with a project

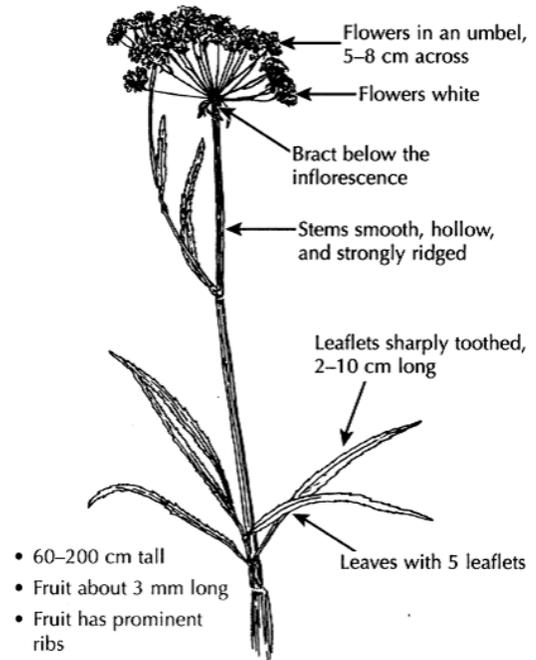


REVISION DATE: 2019-03-18

Cow-Parsnip
Heracleum lanatum



Water-Parsnip
Sium suave



[DIAGRAMS FROM: Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization's \(Field Guide: Identification of common riparian plants of Saskatchewan\).](#)

CONDITIONS FOR POISONING

Western water hemlock poisoning generally occurs in early spring, because the hemlock shoots appear early, before other plants green up. The toxins are concentrated in the tuber and roots, but early in the summer the stems and leaves are also poisonous. Roots are more easily pulled up by animals in spring, resulting in poisoning. Animals may also be poisoned during a drought, when cows concentrate on green vegetation along riparian areas. Toxicity in leaves decreases as the plant matures and may be negligible when dry. However, the roots remain toxic.

