

## M. Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)

### Key Characteristics:

Poison hemlock is a member of the Parsley family. It is a biennial introduced from Europe that may grow up to 9 feet tall. It has a fleshy, stout **taproot** and grows its first year above ground as a **fern-like rosette** of pinnately divided leaves. **Stems** of Poison Hemlock have purple spots at all growth stages. The white **flowers** are borne in umbels, each supported by a stalk.

All plant parts are **extremely poisonous** to humans and most domestic livestock. The plants contain the intensely poisonous alkaloid coniine and other related alkaloids. Children have been poisoned by using the hollow stem as a whistle. Adults have been poisoned by mistaking leaves for parsley, roots for parsnips, or seeds for anise. The plant has an unpleasant taste and odor. Symptoms of poisoning are a burning sensation in the mouth and throat, nervousness, trembling, uncoordinated body movements, dilation of pupils, muscular weakness, coldness of extremities, weakened and slowed heart-beat, convulsions, and coma. Death occurs through respiratory paralysis. Socrates was killed with a formulation of Poison Hemlock.

### Locations:

Poison hemlock is very widespread in Pitkin County. It is common on East and West Sopris Creek, Prince Creek, Watson Divide, and Woody Creek Roads and in Lenado and Snowmass Village.

### Biological control:

The larvae of the Defoliating Hemlock Moth, *Agnopterix alstroemeriana*, chew holes in the leaves and flowers of Poison Hemlock, and feed on seeds prior to pupation. Attacked hemlock plants are extensively defoliated and damaged in the first season of release. Populations of the moth have been released in Snowmass Village and Woody Creek, and seemed to cause substantial damage in their first season. However, it not yet clear whether they have been able to overwinter and reproduce at our altitude.

### Cultural control:

Good vegetative cover lessens likelihood of initial infestations of poison hemlock.



## M. Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) (continued)

### Mechanical control:

Tillage, digging, and pulling are all effective controls but care must be used when handling. Gloves, eye and mouth protection are recommended, to guard against inadvertent contamination by the extremely poisonous sap of this weed.

### Chemical control:

There are some herbicides available that are effective against Poison Hemlock. However, because this plant tends to grow near water and wetlands, herbicide treatment may not be appropriate. Contact Pitkin County Land Management Department for more specific information about herbicide products, application rates, and equipment calibration.

### Native Look-Alikes:

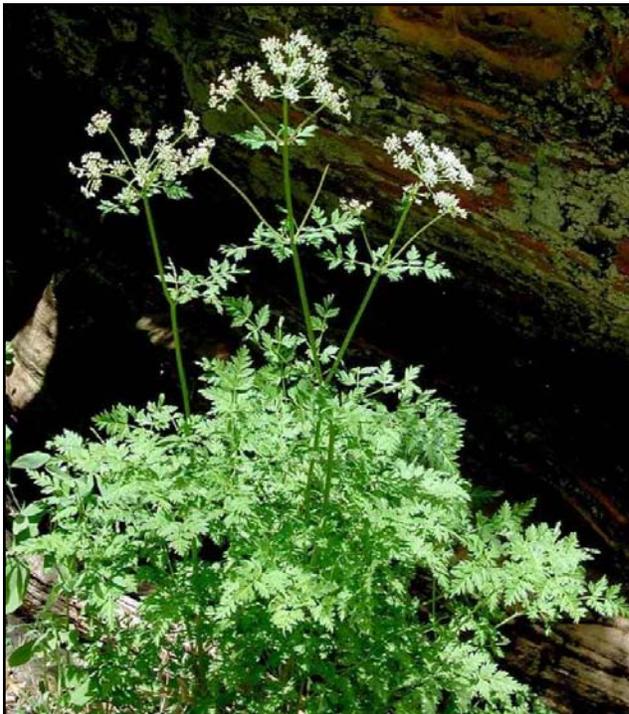
There are many native members of the Parsley family that look very similar to Poison Hemlock. A couple of examples are pictured to the right. **Do not ingest any plant unless you are absolutely positive of its identification.**



#### **Cow Parsnip**

**(*Heracleum sphondylium*)**

Stem thicker, leaves much larger and less subdivided than Poison Hemlock.



#### **Porter's Loveage/Osha**

**(*Ligusticum porteri*)**

Leaflets somewhat more rounded, and umbels somewhat less compact than Poison Hemlock.

Porter's Loveage may have purple striations similar to that on Poison Hemlock. These two plants are very similar and misidentification is common.