

Parsnips and Plein Air

Summer is in full bloom, and hopefully most of us are outdoors with our easels. If you set up along a field edge, near a roadside ditch, or a marsh, keep an eye out for six common plants that can spell trouble if you come into contact with them. Most of these are in the parsnip or carrot family and have a distinctive shape and taller profile. All are found in Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin.

These plants have a yellow or white flower called an umbel, a sort-of umbrella-shaped compound flower with many short flower stalks called pedicels that emerge from a common point. Most are in full flower by mid-July. Plants to avoid are:

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*). Six to eighteen feet tall, white flowers. Stems are thick and hollow. Non-native. Causes severe irritation, blistering and permanent scarring to skin and eyes.



Giant Hogweed (Source: Wikipedia)

Poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*). Three to eight feet tall, white flowers, hairless stems. Invasive. Highly poisonous to people and animals; can cause death if ingested.



Poison hemlock (carrot fern) (Source: Wikipedia)

Spotted water hemlock (*Cicuta maculate*). Native and widespread. Highly poisonous. Three to six feet tall, smooth stems.



Spotted water hemlock (Source: USDA/NRCS)

Common cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*). Native, widespread, white flowers. Four to ten feet tall, stems are fuzzy and grooved.



Common cow parsnip, Pine County MN

Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*). Two to five feet tall, deeply grooved stems, yellow flowers. Causes 2nd degree burns with contact, especially if skin is exposed to sunlight (phytophotodermatitis). Invasive.



Wild Parsnip (Source: MNDNR)

Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*). Very common across MN, white flowers, about two feet tall. May cause skin irritation, and some people may react more than others. Native.



Queen Ann's Lace (Source: MNDNR)

If you happen to brush against one of these plants with your bare skin in the daylight, wash the area with water and cover the skin. If you develop blisters or a rash seek medical attention. For more information on identifying these plants, check out the following references:

USFWS:

<https://medium.com/@USFWS/dont-touch-these-plants-six-lookalikes-you-want-to-avoid-edbe291b69e4>

Video about identifying wild parsnip from UW Extension:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozqdU6_T1uU

MNDNR:

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialplants/herbaceous/wildparsnip.html>