

# WILD PARSNIP

## WHAT IS WILD PARSNIP?

This species is an aggressive, Eurasian weed that frequently invades and modifies a variety of open habitats. This plant has rosettes that grow close to the ground and bear leaves averaging six inches in height. The plant has a long, thick taproot, which is edible. Flowering plants produce a single, thick stem that contains hundreds of yellow umbellate flowers. The lateral flowers often overtop the terminal flowers. Depending on the habitat and growing conditions, individual flowering plants can grow over four feet in height. Leaves are alternate, pinnately compound, branched, and have saw-toothed edges. Each leaf has 5 to 15 ovate to oblong leaflets with variable toothed edges and deep lobes.



This species reproduces readily from seed. Seeds are fairly large and many are produced on one plant. When conditions are favorable, it flowers, produces seed, and dies. Look for the large, coarse, flower spikes and yellow flowers from the first of June to the middle of July (although some plants may continue flowering through late summer). Optimal growing conditions simulate an increase in flowering. Seeds take at least three weeks from flowering to become viable.

## ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Well established prairies are not likely to be invaded by wild parsnip, but it readily moves into disturbed habitats, along edges and or in disturbed patches. It invades slowly, but once population builds it spreads rapidly and can severely modify open dry, moist, and wet-moist habitats. It is primarily a problem in southeastern Minnesota in prairies and oak openings. A native of Europe and Asia this plant has escaped from cultivation, it is grown as root vegetable, and is common throughout the U.S.



## CONTROL

**Mechanical Control:** The best way to control wild parsnip is early detection and eradication. A very effective control method is to cut the entire root just below ground level with a sharp shovel or spade. Cutting below ground level prevents resprouting. In some soil types in wet conditions, the plants can be pulled out of the ground by hand. All seeds must be removed from the site and disposed of in a landfill or by burning. If the population is too large to hand-cut or pull, a power brush-cutter can be used just after peak flowering and before the seeds set. Plants may resprout when cut above the ground, and should be cut again a few weeks later to prevent flowering.

**CHEMICAL CONTROL:** Chemical controls are effective, but should be used sparingly on quality habitats. The best method is to burn the site, then follow with spot applications of herbicide. Immediately after a burn, wild parsnip is one of the first plants to green. Adult plants should be spot treated during the time of plant bolting until flowering (mid-May to mid-June) or in the fall targeting plants in the rosette stage.