

Weekly Article

5-30-2022

The lowdown on Poison Hemlock

Hello, my Name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. The sun and warmth are making a comeback after a lengthy stretch of cooler, wetter weather. The end of May ended on a very soggy note with much of the county receiving large amounts of rainfall and some severe storms. Precipitation amounts were varied but all in all most of the county receive 3+ inches of rain. Many crop fields continue to lay wet and slowly drying out. Planting progress is limping along as many producers are falling behind after each rain event. The forages are in the same boat as well. After last weeks heavy rains and wind, much of the orchard grass, timothy, and tall fescue stands have lodged, making it a challenge to harvest. All in all, forage yields have been reported as being very good to excellent. As I make my travels and field visits across the county there are few key factors that I have taken note of, they are,

- Emerged corn is looking strong on high well drained ground, low wetter areas are waterlogged, additional nitrogen will be needed to help build damage root systems back.
- Soybean and corn are being damage from slugs in heavy residue or crops planted into sod.
- Legumes such as Alfalfa have leaf fungal diseases such as common leaf spot and Stemphylium.
- Flies are heavily populating livestock operations and pinkeye is arising a little earlier than normal.
- Hay fields are lodging as seed head gain weight.
- Poison Hemlock is growing tall and strong!!!

My last field note is the topic at hand today, Poison Hemlock seems to get all the attention this time of year due to it flashy white flower, large stature, and prolific growth. Even though most of my calls about this noxious weed occurs in mid-May to early June, it really should be addressed in early March or even Mid November of the previous year. Poison Hemlock is one of many noxious weeds on the Ohio Noxious weed list. A noxious weed is defined as a plant that can injure agricultural crops and livestock due to their invasiveness, toxicity, and other harmful characteristics. Noxious weeds can also present harm to human health and the overall ecosystem. The Ohio Department of Agriculture has designated a list of said weeds, to learn more about them go to <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-%20901:5-37-01>.

Poison Hemlock has many characteristics that make it noxious in nature. Poison Hemlock is a biannual weed, meaning that it takes two years to complete its life cycle. The first year is establishment from a seed, this is when the plant will concentrate on building roots to grow and store food for the next season. Plants will form a rosette structure that grow low to the ground and look very much like a fern or wild carrot, considering this weed is in Carrot Family. The rosette stage of growth usually occurs in the fall or late summer but can occur throughout the growing season, it is not uncommon to find a plant that is in its first stage of growth growing next to a plant that is in its second stage of reproductive growth. Year #2 is when things get real with this plant as it wakes up from its slumber it will bolt to heights of 6-10 feet tall and create an umbel flower (term for a umbrella shaped flower). This is when this plant can be confused with other types of carrot species such as queen Anne's lace and wild parsnip. When the plant reaches this height control is next to impossible and seed production has occurred. One Poison Hemlock plant can produce up to 38,000 seeds, this is one of many reasons why it is on the noxious weed list. The next reason for noxious label is its potential toxicity characteristics to livestock and humans. Poison Hemlock plant contains toxic compounds called alkaloids that can cause respiratory failure and death to mammals if ingested. All parts of the plant are toxic, but the roots are the most toxic. Most commonly animals (hopefully humans) will avoid eating this plant due to its foul odor. Once again plant parts must be ingested or oils/sap from the plant can enter the body through eyes, skin pores, and nasal pathway, so if you handle this plant wear gloves. A common myth with this plant is that it will cause severe skin rashes, this is not true. This is the case with its counterpart, wild parsnip that makes the skin very sensitive to UV light, creating severe blistering or rashes. Controlling Poison Hemlock should begin early in the first year of growth due to its rapid growth in the second year. Mowing has little effect unless it is strategically timed right before flowering. Application of herbicides such as glyphosate (roundup), triclopyr +2-4-D (cross bow), dicamba, or 2-4-D amine have been proven very effective when applied at the rosette stage of growth. To learn more about identifying this weed go to <https://agcrops.osu.edu/newsletter/corn-newsletter/19-2021/putting-poison-hemlock-perspective> and <https://bygl.osu.edu/node/1782>

Some other details to go over.

- Crop planting certification with USDA FSA – July 15th.
- Forestry Stewardship Field Night June 7th at 6:30pm located at Phipps Family Farm 1092 Vaughn Ridge Road West Union, Ohio 45693. Call the office at (937) 544-2339 to RSVP.

