

Weed of The Week

Poison Hemlock

Part of the parsley family, this weed can be a major issue in pastures and fence rows. Poison Hemlock was thought to be introduced to North America as an ornamental but escaped and became established throughout the United States and Canada. Poison Hemlock is a biennial that produces leaves in basal rosette the first year of growth and then grows an upright stalk and flower that can reach heights of 5-6 ft in height. Some characteristics that stand out for this weed is purple blotches on the stem and small white flowers in umbrella shaped clusters. Poison Hemlock will flower in late May and early June producing up to 38,000 seeds per plant. One good note is that seeds have very low viability of five or less years. All parts of the Poison Hemlock plant are toxic to livestock and humans, causing respiratory failure. Research shows that plants grown in sunny and dry conditions are more toxic than plants grown in wet and shady conditions. Early spring and early winter are the two times of year where livestock are more likely to consume poison hemlock due to it being one of the only plants still green and growing. According to the USDA, cattle can be poisoned from eating as little as 300 grams and this includes plant material in silage or hay. One of the best options in controlling poison hemlock is fall and early spring applications of 2-4-D and Glyphosate while the plant is still in the rosette stage of growth.

