

Bluestem Breezes  
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## **Poison Hemlock**

A couple of weeks ago, this column focused on a plant called poison hemlock. A great question came from that column: what is the difference between this poison hemlock and Queen Anne's lace? Is it the same weed?

Poison hemlock and Queen Anne's lace are both members of the Parsley family, however they are indeed two different plants.

You may be more familiar with Queen Anne's lace if I call it "wild carrot".

Both plants are forbs that offer tiny white flowers (compound umbel, corolla, with 5 petals) late spring through early summer. They have very erect stems (with hints of purple) secured underground by a taproot.

These are biennials, meaning their first year of growth is vegetative; the second year produces flowers and seeds.

While there are differences in their leaf structure, both plants have leaves that alternate their placement along the stem. They are fern-like and will remind you of the household herb parsley.

A very distinct difference in the two plants may be their height. Wild carrot (Queen Anne's lace) grows 1-5 feet tall, while poison hemlock may reach 10 feet tall.

I often refer to a book called "Weeds of the Great Plains" (published by Nebraska Dept. of Ag). If you are searching for a plant identification reference book, this is one to obtain. Here are a few interesting facts about these plants outlined in the book:

Although Europeans consider wild carrot mildly poisonous in horses and cattle, there is no evidence of those issues in the U.S. And actually, it is unpalatable to livestock.

The root extract was used by pioneers to color butter, and it is a good source of vitamin A.

Poison hemlock is also rather unpalatable to livestock; but, it is indeed lethal at certain levels. It is also poisonous to humans.

As well, Socrates may have been put to death with poison hemlock. You might recall the name 'Socrates' from literature classes, as he was an ancient Greek philosopher.

For additional information on poison hemlock or wild carrot, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.