



**Poison hemlock**

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**Queen Anne's lace**

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## ASK A MASTER GARDENER

# Poison hemlock vs. Queen Anne's lace

**QUESTION:** When I purchased acreage out in the country, the previous owner warned me about the presence of poison hemlock. I have been trying to figure out what it looks like, but I think I may just have Queen Anne's lace growing on my property. How do I tell the difference?

**ANSWER:** Both Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) and poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum* L.) are native to Europe and Asia and were introduced to North America in the 1800s. They are commonly found in central Oregon.

The differences between Queen Anne's lace and poison hemlock are not always easy to spot, especially in their early growth stages. As a word of warning, if your skin comes into contact with poison hemlock, treat it as though you came into contact with poison oak or ivy.

For some sensitive people, even casual contact with Queen Anne's lace will cause a rash or blisters. So if you are going to go out investigating

what is actually growing on your property, perhaps gloves and a long sleeved shirt would be prudent.

Both of these plants have white flowers and delicate fern-like leaves that are divided into many small segments. Do not use the leaves as an identifying factor because they are just too similar in appearance.

Fortunately, there are a few key characteristics when trying to spot the differences. Queen Anne's lace will have a very fuzzy, hairy stem with one central flower having a tiny purple flower in its center. Poison hemlock will have multiple flowers and will have a smooth stem with purple or red splotches.

One way to help you remember that Queen Anne's lace has the tiny purple flower in the center is by sharing this bit of folklore. This plant is said to be named after Queen Anne herself. One day while sewing, she pricked herself with a needle and a drop of blood fell onto her lace, leaving a single dark purple flower in the center of the white flower.



**Linda Estep**  
Master Gardener

Queen Anne's lace belongs to the carrot family, so when crushed, the leaves and stem will smell like carrots. The flowers of Queen Anne's lace grow in disc-shaped flower clusters called umbels (umbrella shaped). The crown will be flat and face the sky, and there may be multiple umbels per plant.

They have a distinct central flower that is surrounded by smaller flowers, giving the flower head a lacy appearance. The plant grows between 2-3 feet tall. The flowers bloom from late spring to early fall and are followed by spiky seed heads.

As the seeds ripen, the seed head curls inward to form a bird's nest shape and turns a brownish color.

Queen Anne's lace is a common sight along roadsides,

in fields and in meadows. It prefers well-drained soil and full sun, but can also grow in partial shade. The plant is often used in wildflower gardens and as a cut flower in floral arrangements.

Queen Anne's lace is toxic to pets if ingested. Queen Anne's lace is used by some native animals for food – however, it is classified as an invasive weed in Oregon. It invades open ground, competing for resources with native grasses and forbs (flowering, nongrassy herbaceous plants).

Poison hemlock is also a member of the carrot family, but when its leaves are crushed they smell very musty. It prefers moist soil and can be found growing along roadsides, streams, in ditches and in wet meadows. Poison hemlock is a highly toxic plant that is poisonous to humans, pets and livestock when ingested. All parts of the plant are toxic.

Poison hemlock is a biennial plant. In its first year, it is a low-growing rosette, and in its second year, it will grow to be 8 feet tall. During the first year,

it may be difficult to spot the red or purple splotches on the stem. By the second year, the splotches are easily seen.

The flowers of poison hemlock are not as lacy as the flowers of Queen Anne's lace. The flowers bloom from late spring to early summer and are followed by spiky seed heads that also resemble bird nests.

Queen Anne's lace and poison hemlock do look similar at first glance, but they differ in many important ways. These plants have distinct characteristics that make them easy to identify. By learning about these differences, you can avoid putting yourself or your pets at risk.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*