

Controlling Wild Parsnip on State Highways

One Size does NOT Fit All

Wild parsnip is a hazardous and invasive weed that should be controlled on roadsides. Control tactics will vary by region because the abundance of wild parsnip varies across Minnesota. It is most common in southeastern Minnesota but is spreading into other areas of the state. The best strategy is to eradicate new and isolated infestations, contain intermediate infestations, and manage well-established and widespread infestations. Specific situations will dictate what combination of mowing, herbicide application, and other control techniques should be used. Correct timing of management activities is critical for successful wild parsnip control.

Manage Widespread Infestations

Wild parsnip is so abundant in southeastern Minnesota that it would be impossible to eradicate. It can only be managed. Control efforts should seek to reduce people's exposure and limit its spread. This means removing wild parsnip from rest areas, road shoulders, inslopes and maintenance facilities. Wild parsnip cannot be eliminated from ditches and backslopes in this region but its abundance can be reduced by managing roadsides for tall native grasses and forbs.

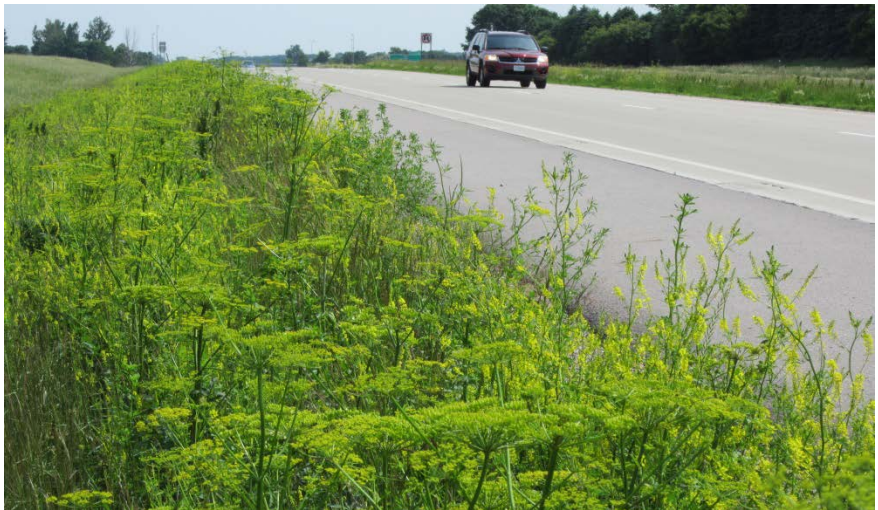


Figure 1: Wild parsnip on a road shoulder and inslope

Contain Moderate Infestations

There are many areas where wild parsnip is moderately abundant. The control strategy here is to contain it—eradicate small, isolated patches and prevent further spread from large, well-established infestations.

Eradicate Isolated Infestations

Wild parsnip is still uncommon in some parts of the state, such as western Minnesota. Work in these areas should focus on eradicating it from roadsides while encouraging adjacent landowners to eradicate it from their properties.

Mowing: Part Problem, Part Solution

Roadside mowing can spread wild parsnip to new areas. Mowing can also be used to control wild parsnip. It all depends on timing.

Mow During Flowering to Control Wild Parsnip

Mowing in late summer will spread wild parsnip because the ripe seeds are carried on the mower. Mowing wild parsnip after flowers have emerged but before seeds begin to enlarge can prevent seed production. Plants will re-flower but will not produce viable seed unless the growing season is long. A second mowing or follow-up herbicide application can ensure that no seed is produced.

Weed Control and the Mowing Law

A common misconception about the mowing law is that road authorities are only allowed to mow during August. Not only is this untrue, but August is the worst time to mow for control of wild parsnip. MN Statute 160.232 restricts mowing outside of August to protect nests of game birds and other wildlife. However, this law allows mowing as needed for weed control, safety and management of native vegetation.



Figure 2: Wild parsnip seed beginning to enlarge

Pollinator Habitat and Weed Control

Pollinators depend on native wildflowers for food. Many invasive species, including wild parsnip, degrade pollinator habitat by crowding out native wildflowers. Controlling weeds along roads can improve roadside habitat and can also prevent infestations from spreading beyond the roadside where they could harm much more habitat.

Although herbicides are not particularly toxic to insects, both herbicides and mowing can kill wildflowers and should be used carefully. Judicious weed control efforts will balance the short-term impacts to pollinator habitat with the long-term benefits of reduced invasive species infestations and improved wildflower populations.

For More Information

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