

# How to Avoid a Wild Chervil Infestation



I happen to live at the epicenter of an invasive plant explosion.

Many farmers and home owners in my area wish they had realized what would happen if they did

nothing about the pretty white flowering plant that began appearing around Randolph several years ago. Wild chervil is already in most parts of Vermont and will almost certainly come to your area, and I'd like to give you the opportunity to keep it from taking over as it has in the Randolph area.

Wild Chervil (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) first captured my attention in 1996 and I have been studying it since. What I've learned is that **there is no known way to eradicate wild chervil once it is established** and the only hope of avoiding an inundation is to learn to identify it and act early to prevent it from getting established in your area and on your land.

**The earlier you take action once you spot it, and the earlier you work during the growing season, the more success you will have.** Procrastination pretty much guarantees an infestation.

## Why should you care? Don't you have enough to do?

The real issue is not wild chervil, it is the other plants in your pasture, hay field, yard or woodland that are being pushed out by chervil. Wild chervil is a robust Eurasian native which has many characteristics that allow it to quickly colonize new areas, out-compete existing plants and create a

mono-culture. It is being spread along roadsides at an ever increasing rate. From roadsides, chervil moves into pastures and fields.

Cows typically don't eat it, although heifers on intense rotational grazing may. Each uneaten plant sets 800-1200 seeds and the resulting new plants quickly displace preferred forage. Plants also reproduce vegetatively by producing 5-10 crown off-set plantlets around each parent. If harvested in forage it will reduce crop quality due to molding, and cows often don't want to eat hay which includes chervil.

Vegetable growers should know that wild chervil serves as a host to parsnip yellow fleck virus which infects carrots, celery and parsnips.

## Light vs. heavy-handed approach

Assuming you choose to take action to avoid an inundation of wild chervil, the earlier you begin, the less work you'll have to do and the lighter touch you'll be able to apply. A light touch will allow the natives or previous vegetation to re-establish themselves, and will keep more chervil, and/or other weeds, from moving in to take advantage of the disturbance of turned or trampled soil, existing seeds exposed to light, and injured native plants.

Contrast a light touch, respecting all plants, to the common response to invasive plants and infestations of weeds, which is to fall into a belligerent, angry, heavy-handed mood. The plants are your enemy and you attack them with tools and perhaps poisons. This war-like mindset is actually damaging to your true goal – to make it possible for the plants and crops you want to thrive. Tramping about on a patch of chervil may bring momentary satisfaction, but in the long term you have probably hurt the existing plants and disturbed the soil enough to allow more chervil plants to come up. This typically leads to frustration, inaction and eventually hopelessness.

## What you can do

- 1- Learn what wild chervil looks like. Watch during May and June when it is flowering, and once you find a plant, examine its leaves. You need to be able to identify it during its vegetative stage because it is best worked on from first emergence as the snow melts in April until about June 1<sup>st</sup> when the seeds begin to set. I call this **Chervil Season**.
- 2- If possible, visit an area that has a lot of it so you can experience how completely wild

chervil can take over an area. It is hard to believe until you see it. This should inspire you to take the time to prevent it from becoming established in new areas.

- 3- As soon as you see a plant, STOP and weed it out or at least cut it down. A single plant this year will be a patch the size of your bathroom next year, and of your family room the following year. You need to take action to prevent it from getting established. "Don't just assume this is going to be alright," says Peter Leonard, former Vermont Technical College farm and orchard manager.
- 4- Do not mow after seed set. Both Leonard and Dave Silloway of Randolph Center unknowingly spread chervil into their fields by mowing. Farmers who mow from the edge of a field near roadside chervil infestations invariably spread the plant deeper onto their own land.
- 5- If there is any chance of chervil being in your area, thoroughly brush and even wash your mowing machine and tractor to remove seeds before you move to different fields.
- 6- Sheep (and perhaps goats) enjoy eating young chervil and allowing them to intensively graze the plant may be a way to control it.
- 7- Talk with your selectboard and/or town road supervisor to encourage them to mow roadsides before mid-June or not at all. Because roadside mowing after seed set is the main way this plant is being spread, advocating for changed mowing schedules and stopping and pulling single plants when you first see them are probably the **most important things you can do**.
- 8- See the internet resources at the bottom of this article for more information on control & identification.

When asked if he has advice for other farmers about wild chervil, Peter Leonard said: "If you think bedstraw has been a problem in your fields during the last 10 years, this is much worse than bedstraw". Dave Silloway's advice is "be careful – don't let it get established". After about 7 years of mowing, weeding out and trying a number of

herbicides, Silloway reports that chervil is still gaining in his pastures and hay fields. He also admonishes that "if people use a mower they should definitely clean and wash it before they put it anywhere else".

### Identifying Wild Chervil

Wild chervil looks like a robust version of Queen Anne's Lace, except that it blooms from mid-May to mid-June rather than in late July and August. It is typically 3'-4' tall, but grows to 6'. It has finely cut triangular shaped leaves, grooved stems and umbels of lacy white flowers which are domed rather than flat like Queen Anne's Lace. The stalks are branching. The rosettes of dark green ferny leaves are visible as the snow melts, particularly in ditches, road verges and edges of wood. It enjoys moist, fertile locations and tolerates shade. I have yet to see a location where chervil will not grow.



For more information, including more pictures, go to **Wild Chervil Information Center** at:  
<http://www.rherald.com/common/Chervil/Chervil.html>

Or **UVM Master Gardener Invasive Plant Information for Vermont** at:  
<http://www.uvm.edu/mastergardener/invasives/invasivesindex.html>

For Light touch/ Bradley Method:  
<http://casparcommons.org/Gorse/BradleyMethod.htm> ,  
"Problems w/ Traditional Weeding Techniques":  
<http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/GA/NAT/TipsAndTools/Library/Weedingright.htm>

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