

garlic mustard fact sheet



early spring rosette



late spring flowers



seed pods ready to split

What is it?

Garlic mustard is a biennial (it takes two years to complete its reproductive cycle) herb that was first brought here by European settlers for culinary and medicinal purposes, but now it's a rampant, aggressive, invasive weed that threatens Lincoln's fields, woods, conservation land, and neighborhoods.

What does it look like?

It depends on its stage of growth. First-year plants form a rosette of round- or heart-shaped leaves close to the ground that smell like garlic when crushed. Second-year plants send up 5-36" tall stems topped by small, white flowers that appear in late April. In time, leaves start losing color, the garlic smell fades and the flowers disintegrate, giving way to long, thin seed pods filled with tiny black seeds. After the seeds are dispersed, the plant dies, but the seeds will live on.

Where does it grow?

It prefers the dappled shade of forest edges, and moist, shady areas near water. But it has cunningly adapted to full sun, and now grows along roadsides, train tracks, in places where the soil has been disturbed, and anywhere it wants.

How does it spread?

One plant can produce up to *6,000 seeds that can remain viable in the soil for up to 7 years!* Seeds can be spread by birds, deer, squirrels and horses, on the bottom of human's shoes, vehicle tires, and the blades of mowing equipment. Streams, heavy rains and wind carry seeds to new sites. That's why it's crucial to pull plants before they go to seed.

Why is it so bad?

A few plants on your property that go to seed will explode exponentially into a serious infestation over time. If left to grow unchecked, they can completely cover an area in 4-5 years - and each of those plants will be producing thousands of seeds!. Garlic mustard eliminates native plants, which wildlife depend on, and it can stunt the growth of native trees. No animals will eat it, so it has no predators - except for educated, vigilant citizens who pull it out. Even worse, garlic mustard roots produce a chemical that prevents other plants from growing in that soil!

How can you control it?

Pull it as soon as you spot it! It's most effective to remove as many plants as possible in April or May - before they go to seed and spread. They pull out of the ground easily with a gentle tug; make sure to grab the whole root or they will re-sprout. For larger areas, cut or mow plants close to ground level before flowers and seeds are produced. You'll have to do this repeatedly, because they will try to re-flower again and again. Garlic mustard is tenacious.

How do I dispose of it?

Rosettes can be pulled and left to dry on the ground in the sun to kill the roots, but don't make a big pile or the roots can stay moist and grow again.