

## **Spring is the time to find and control garlic mustard**

“Garlic mustard is winning that race in more and more woodlands,” notes Kelly Kearns a native plant conservation specialist with the Department of Natural Resources. “The fast growth and high seed production have made this plant imported from Eurasia able to outcompete our native wildflowers and even young trees.”

Kearns says observant gardeners will also notice that it is becoming widespread in urban lots, both in the shade and even in full sun at times. In order to keep this plant from spreading all property and home owners need to learn how to identify it and help control it on their own lands.

“Just one plant,” Kearns said “allowed to go to seed, can infest an entire neighborhood or wooded park.”

Also known by the scientific name of *Alliaria petiolata*, garlic mustard is a biennial herb that ranges from 2 to 40 inches in height as an adult flowering plant. Second-year plants generally produce one to several flowering stems with numerous white flowers that each have four petals.

Garlic mustard can easily be recognized at this time of year by of its lush rounded basal leaves with scalloped edges and because it is the only plant of its height in forests that produces white flowers in the spring. If in doubt, crush and smell a leaf. If it smells like garlic you have found garlic mustard. By mid-June the flowers will develop seed pods that can disperse hundreds of seeds per plant. Even if pulled out of the ground while still flowering, garlic mustard flowers can continue to develop and produce seeds.

Kearns says landowners working to contain this plant have to remain vigilant, as the seeds can stay dormant in the soil for up to seven years before germinating.

“People should search through their entire property several times a year to catch new infestations and keep them from flowering and going to seed,” she said.

For small populations, Kearns says, hand pulling is the best way to remove the plants. If they have started to flower, gather the plants and bury or burn them where allowed, or bag them up to send to the landfill in bags labeled “Invasive Plants – Approved by WDNR for landfilling”.

Larger populations can be knocked back with a string line trimmer, but this must be done several times in the growing season as they will resprout. Most land managers with larger populations carefully spot treat garlic mustard populations with herbicide. There are several herbicides that can be effective, including glyphosate, triclopyr and 2,4-D. Kearns advises anyone using herbicides to read the label instructions before applying them and be careful not to apply to any plants they want to keep.

In the southern part of Wisconsin garlic mustard seedlings are just recently emerging from the soil. Flaming with a propane torch is a technique that can be fast and effective to kill the seedlings, but is less successful with the older flowering plants. Torching is best done when the ground is wet, or even during a light rain to prevent any accidental fires.

“Once people learn to identify garlic mustard,” Kearns said, “they will probably start to think

they are seeing it everywhere, especially in southern counties. But there are still many forests and entire regions of the state that are not yet infested. In those areas careful monitoring can spot new populations and quick action to control the plants will save landowners many hours of pulling this very aggressive plant.”

**Photographs** and more information about **garlic mustard** and other invasive plants is available on the **invasive species** pages of the DNR Website and the Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin Web site [[www.ipaw.org](http://www.ipaw.org)]

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kelly Kearns (608) 267-5066.