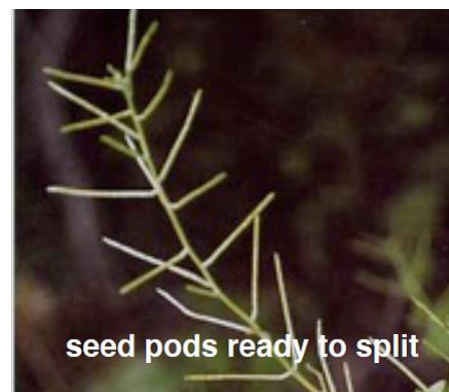


Garlic Mustard Fact Sheet



What is it? Garlic mustard is a cool season biennial (it takes two years to complete its life cycle) herb that was likely brought here by European settlers for culinary and medicinal purposes, but now it is an aggressive invasive plant that is spreading rapidly in Harvard, particularly along roadsides.

What does it look like? First-year plants form a rosette of round or heart-shaped leaves close to the ground that look a little like violets and smell like garlic when crushed. Second-year plants send up 5- to 36-inch tall stems topped by small, white flowers that appear in late April and into May. In June, 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 by mid-summer.

Where does it grow? It prefers the dappled shade of forest edges, and moist, shady areas near water. It can also grow in full sun, and is found along roadsides and in places where the soil has been disturbed.

How does it spread? One plant can produce up to 6,000 seeds that can remain viable in the soil for up to seven years! Seeds can be spread by deer, squirrels, horses and people -- on the bottom of shoes, vehicle tires, and the blades of snowplows and mowers. Streams, heavy rains and wind also carry seeds to new sites.

Why is it so bad? A few plants that go to seed will explode into a serious infestation in short order -- completely covering an area in five years. Garlic mustard crowds out native woodland plants (both beautiful and needed by insects and wildlife) and releases a chemical that kills beneficial fungi in the soil, inhibiting other plants from growing and even stunting the growth of established trees. The leaves are also poisonous to butterfly larvae that rely on native early spring plants. Few animals will eat it, so it isn't controlled naturally.

How can you control it? 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, trying to grab the whole root so they don't re-sprout. A dandelion tool can help extricate larger roots in one piece. *(Take precautions for poison ivy that may not have leafed out but often grows in the same places!)* Large areas may be cut or mowed close to ground before flowers and seeds are produced, but you'll have to do this repeatedly because they will try to re-flower again and again. Once seed-heads are formed, mowing won't help.

How do I dispose of it? Rosettes can be pulled and left to dry in the sun, roots facing up, but don't make a pile or compost or the roots will stay moist and grow again. Plants with flowers need to be bagged and disposed of with trash or burned or buried in a pit, because even after you pull them, the plant will still go to seed! So pull and put them directly into a paper or plastic bag.