

Common Name: **Poison Hemlock**

Genus: *Conium*

Species: *maculatum*

Family: Apiaceae

AKA: Herb Bennet, Spotted Corobane, Poison Parsley, Spotted Hemlock, Kecksies (4).



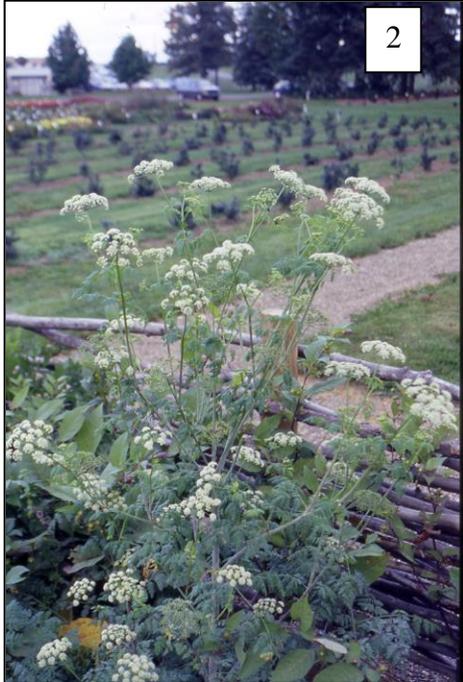
## Historical Uses:

**Medical:** “The great hemlock doubtlesse is not possessed with any good facultie, as appeareth by his loathsome smell, and other apparent signes, and therefore not to be used in physiche. Dioscorides writeth, saying hemlock is a very evil, dangerous, hurtfull, and poisonous herbe, insomuch that whosoever taketh of it into his body dieth , except the party drinke some wine that is naturally hot, before the venome have taken the heart, as Pliny saith but being drunke with wine the poyson is greater speed carried to the heart, by reason it killeth presently.” (1)

“Cicuta ...is of ye venomous herbs, killing by its coldness, but it is helped by unmixed wine. The tops, or ye hair are juiced before that ye seed be dry, and being beaten is pressed out, &and thickened by stirring it in ye sun, which being dried is of much use for service in cures. The juice being fitly mixed with Anodynall collieries. It doth extinguish ye Herpetas, & ye Erysipelata being smeared on. And ye herb, & ye hair being beaten small & smeared on ye stones doth help wanton dreamers, & seed shedders, & doth enfeeble ye genitals being smeared on, & drive away milk, & forbids ye breasts to grow great in time of virginity & makes ye stones in children unnourishable.” (2)

“Hemlock [*scherling*] is warm and has danger in it so that if a person eats it, it destroys everything that has been established as good and right in the blood and humors.. It causes bad inundations in the person the same way storms cause disturbances in water. After this storm has stopped, the worst mucuses and illnesses remain. But let whoever has been struck with spears and clubs, or whoever has fallen from a high place so that his or her flesh and limbs are crushed, cook hemlock in water and place the expressed water upon the members that have been injured. And let the person tie a piece of cloth over the injury so that the humors that have collected there will be dissipated because the hemlock will dissipate them. Also, let the person who swells up between the skin and flesh from





an impact or blow, or from something thrown, heat hemlock in water and tie it over the swelling; the swelling will disappear. However, if a swelling comes in some member from some illness. Hemlock will not help because if it is placed over the swelling, it will force the humors that ought to go to the wound or leave from the flesh to go back inwardly in the person with great danger.” (3)

**Folklore/Astrology:** “Cold and dry, a plant of Saturn. In Russia a plant of Satan, a funereal plant a part of Hell’s vegetation. An herb of ill omen and a favorite of witches practicing black magic. Other: Used by the Athenians to execute those condemned to death, Socrates being a prime example (399 BC).” (4)

**Other:** “The generic name Conium is derived from the Greek word *Konas*, meaning to whirl about, because the plant, when eaten, causes vertigo and death. The name Hemlock is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words *hem* (border, shore) and *leác* (leek or plant). The plant was used in Anglo-Saxon medicine and is mentioned as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century.” (5)

**Cautions:** All parts of the plant are poisonous. Be careful of any contact with this plant!

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### Contemporary Uses:

**Parts Used:** Leaves, fruits, seeds.

**Medicinal:** A narcotic, sedative herb that relieves pain if used properly. Hemlock contains alkaloids, chiefly coniine, which paralyze the respiratory nerves, so that a victim dies of suffocation before the heart stops beating. Formerly used internally for epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease, mania, chorea, cramps, and asthma. Excess causes dilation of the pupils, difficulty in breathing, paralysis, stupor, and death. Externally, usually in ointments or oils, for mastitis, malignant tumors (especially breast cancer), anal fissure, and hemorrhoids.” (6)

**Cautions:** All parts of the plant are poisonous. Be careful of any contact with this plant! May be subject to legal restrictions in some countries.



**Area of Origin:** North Africa, temperate Europe and Asia.  
**Physical description:** “Tall, fetid biennial with purple spotted stems and finely divided leaves.” (7)  
**Plant type:** Biennial  
**Form:** Tall  
**Height:** 4ft-10ft  
**Flower color:** Tiny white flowers in bundles  
**Flowering period:** Summer  
**Soil type/requirements:** Damp rich soil  
**Fruit:** Dark, purple to black, cherry like.  
**Hardiness zone:** USDA 5-10  
**Sun requirements:** Sun or partial shade  
**Propagation:** By seed in spring.



Close-up of the flowers

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### **Bibliography**

1. Gerard, p.
2. Dioscorides, p. 477-478
3. Von Bingen, p.36-37
4. Anderson, p. 87
5. Grieve, p. 391-394
6. Ibid
7. Bown, p. 177-178

### **Illustrations:**

1. Gerards Herbal            1633 ed.
2. PSUMG                    2005
3. PSUMG                    2005
4. PSUMG                    2005