

Invasive Plants Series

Garlic Mustard

Lisa Johnson, Commercial Horticulture Agent, UW-Extension Milwaukee/Waukesha Counties

What is garlic mustard? Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) is a European woodland plant introduced to North America by early settlers for its culinary and alleged medicinal qualities. In North America, European insects and diseases that control the plant's population are not present. Garlic mustard starts growing earlier in the season than our native plants, and out-competes them. It also produces large quantities of seed. For these reasons, garlic mustard spreads rapidly in wooded areas, forming tall, dense stands that smother native wildflowers, and native tree and shrub seedlings. It can overrun a forest floor in a few years, destroying a previously healthy ecosystem by eliminating many plant species. In addition, animals, birds and insects that depended on a diversity of plant species for food and shelter can then no longer live in the infested area.

What does garlic mustard look like? Garlic mustard is a biennial plant with a two-year life cycle. The first year, it forms a rosette of round, scalloped-margined leaves that stay semi-evergreen through winter. The second year, it sends up a flower stem with triangular toothed leaves that bears tiny white flowers with four petals. The plant dies after producing long narrow seedpods. At maturity, garlic mustard plants may be 3-4' tall and bear up to 500 seeds per plant.



Garlic Mustard 1st yr rosette



2nd year plant and flowers



Mature plant with seedpods

How can I control garlic mustard? Repeat any control method for several years since garlic mustard seeds can survive in the soil for up to 7 years. Hand-pull small infestations, but do not compost the plants because most compost piles do not get hot enough to kill the seeds. Dispose of pulled plants by burying deeply in an area that will not be disturbed, or landfilling. Call the Bureau of Endangered Resources at 608-266-7012 if you need permission to landfill garlic mustard. To burn collected plants, burn them while still moist, since dried garlic mustard seedpods can burst open and spread the seed. If you use an herbicide, spray early in spring or late in fall, because our native plants are dormant then, but garlic mustard is still green and vulnerable to sprays. A 1-2% solution of a glyphosate-containing herbicide is very effective. Glyphosate is a nonselective herbicide, so avoid spraying nontarget plants. Read and follow all label directions on the herbicide product. Encourage your community to scout for garlic mustard in your area and remove it if found.

For more information on garlic mustard: See the Extension brochure "Garlic Mustard: A Major Threat to Wisconsin's Woodlands", Pub. 2000.

© 2001 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System doing business as the division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin Extension.

An EEO/Affirmative Action employer, University of Wisconsin Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements.

References to pesticide products in this publication are for your convenience and are not an endorsement or criticism of one product over similar products. You are responsible for using pesticides according to the manufacturer's current label directions. Follow directions exactly to protect the environment and people from pesticide exposure. Failure to do so violates the law.

This fact sheet is based on an Extension brochure written by Paul Hartman, UWEX Brown County. Left photo by Laurie Weiss. Middle and right photos by Elizabeth J. Czarapata.

Thanks to Brian Hudelson, Kristin Kleeberger, Laura Jull, Ann Wied and Paul Hartman for reviewing this draft.