

Invasive Species Management Guide

Garlic Mustard

Garlic mustard is an invasive biennial herbaceous plant which disrupts the natural ecosystem by crowding out native plants and by adding chemicals to the soil that inhibit the growth of native plants and fungi. It sprouts from seed in the late summer/early fall and grows a basal rosette of rounded leaves. It stays green all winter. In the spring, the plant grows an erect 3-foot stalk with heart-shaped leaves which have toothed edges. The plant flowers for several weeks from April through May, setting seeds in stages. The small flowers have four petals and are white. The slender seed pods, called siliques, shatter when dry, spreading seeds in the vicinity. The seeds remain viable in and on the ground for up to five years. This is known as the seed bank. Controlling an infestation of garlic mustard is a multi-year project.



First year basal rosette



Second year flowering plants



Flowers and Leaves



Seed pods (siliques)



Even young plants have extensive roots

Control

Mechanical Control

The best control for garlic mustard is to pull it. It can be trimmed at ground level, but it will likely regrow from its roots. The flowers can be cut off, but that requires multiple repeat visits in a single season. The most effective control is pulling the plant in its entirety, getting as much of the root as possible. Small hand tools such as a dandelion weeding fork or trowel will help loosen the soil around the plant.

If the plant has not set any fruit, it can be disposed of on site. Shake the dirt off the roots and leave the plant upside down. It will die.

If the plant has set any fruit at all, it must be bagged and disposed of. Black plastic bags should be used. They should be left in the sun to “solarize” a week or two before disposal.

Chemical Control

Treatment of basal rosettes with small amounts of herbicide such as glyphosate or triclopyr in the fall is an option. Care should be taken to avoid non-target plants. Since the plants remain green all winter, application can be done in late fall before the snow falls.