



Photo: Allen Bridgman, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Bugwood.org



## AMERICAN POKEWEED (*Phytolacca americana*)

4-County CWMA Class B



Photo: Kathy Shearin, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

### Other Control Methods

Use herbicide control methods only for large infestations where manual and mechanical removal becomes impractical. For any herbicide applications we urge you to work with a licensed herbicide applicator. To learn more, consult the best management practices provided by the 4-County Cooperative Weed Management Area ([www.4countycwma.org/AWeeds/Best-Management-Practices/](http://www.4countycwma.org/AWeeds/Best-Management-Practices/)). If any information provided contradicts the label, the label takes precedence. Always read and follow the label on any herbicide product you are using!

Please contact your local weed program in either Oregon ([www.Oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Weeds/Pages/CountyWeedPrograms.aspx](http://www.Oregon.gov/ODA/programs/Weeds/Pages/CountyWeedPrograms.aspx)) or Washington ([www.NWCB.wa.gov/Find-Your-County-Weed-Boards](http://www.NWCB.wa.gov/Find-Your-County-Weed-Boards)) for more information about how to control this invasive weed.



The mission of the 4-County Cooperative Weed Management Area, comprising Clackamas, Clark, Multnomah, and Washington Counties, is to create and support collaborative weed management in the greater Portland area. For more details on our collaborative efforts in management, mapping, and outreach, please visit our website:

[www.4CountyCWMA.org](http://www.4CountyCWMA.org)

### Overview

Many parts of this plant are highly toxic if eaten. Commonly found in disturbed areas and more increasingly in urban landscapes, this plant can be very difficult to eradicate once established. Pokeweed was brought to this region as an ornamental from the southeastern United States where it's native. Seeds are spread by birds. Plants are also passed among neighbors and sold at plant sales and swaps. It's considered invasive in the Pacific Northwest.

### How to Identify

Pokeweed is a 2-8 ft. tall herbaceous perennial. The stem is smooth, stout, hollow and bright pink. The **leaves are large and egg-shaped** with pointed tips and smooth edges, and are alternately arranged on the stem. **Flowers are white or green** and form elongated clusters that hang from branches in early summer. Fruit are hanging clusters of **very dark purple berries** with crimson juice that stains. The large, white, fleshy taproot is carrot-shaped when young, growing to the size of a bowling ball or larger when the plant matures. Plants die back to the ground each winter only to re-emerge the following spring.

### Look-alikes

This plant has sometimes been mistaken for Japanese knotweed, another invasive species in northwestern Oregon. Knotweed has hollow spotted green or reddish stems and triangular to heart shaped leaves rather than the bright pink stems and oval leaves of pokeweed. Japanese knotweed flowers tend to grow upwards rather than in a downward droop and will not produce the dark berries characteristic of pokeweed.



Photos: Chelsea White-Brainard, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

## Prevention

CUT off flower heads and **dispose of them in the trash** to prevent spread by birds. Avoid purchasing this plant and look out for it at plant swaps. PULL/DIG up this plant as soon as it is identified as it will be more difficult to remove manually if it is allowed to reach maturity. Pokeweed is a perennial forb with stems, leaves, and flowers that die back to the ground each year, but the roots live through the winter. As such, removal of pokeweed is **best undertaken in spring**, when new stems and leaves develop, making location and identification easier.



Photo: Karan A. Rawlins, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org



Photo: Theodore Webster, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org

## Manual Control Method

### TOOLS YOU NEED:

- Shovel or spade
- Trash bags for seeds and flowers
- Gloves

1. Early identification and removal when shoots are young is the quickest and easiest means of control.
2. Small plants can be hand PULLED. Larger, more established plants should be DUG out in early spring when soil is moist and new growth has begun.
3. Be thorough in removing the entire root, as new sprouts may grow from any root fragments left behind.
4. Weeds may be composted, but flowers, seeds, and berries should be disposed of in the trash.
5. PLANT the area with native or non-invasive plants after the bulk of the invasive plants are removed. This will help repopulate the area with desired species and prevent new and recurring invasions.
6. Native Alternatives: Native blue or red elderberry (*Sambucus cerulea* or *Sambucus racemosa*) are fast growing, deciduous shrubs with creamy white flower heads and berries that are edible to wildlife.



Photo: Theodore Webster, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org



Photo: Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org