**Not Giant Hogweed or Angelica -- Otsego weed is poison hemlock, WMU professor confirms**

By [Rosemary Parker | rparker3@mlive.com](http://connect.mlive.com/staff/rparker/posts.html)   
on June 05, 2013 at 11:39 AM

**OTSEGO, MI --** When Todd Barkman saw an MLive posting Monday about [giant hogweed](http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2013/06/giant_hogweed_may_be_growing_n.html) in Otsego Township he suspected from the photos that the plants were not hogweed, but Conium maculatum, also known as poison hemlock.

A professor of biological sciences at Western Michigan University, Barkman took his plant systematics class to the site Tuesday and verified that it is indeed poison hemlock-- ["definitely not Angelica](http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2013/06/angelica_a_giant_hogweed_looka.html)," the tentative identification of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, he said.

"We did not do anything to remove or kill the plants. Since they are deadly if ingested it probably is not a problem to handle them to some extent. However, when pulling out a bunch of them, a fair bit of plant sap will get on your hands. Then, if you don't sufficiently wash up afterwards, who knows?" Barkman said. "Since I am responsible for the college students' well-being, we did not attempt eradication."

It may be rather a lost cause anyway, Barkman said. "At this point, eradicating that species (poison hemlock)," he said, "is like getting rid of any of our other worst invaders: nearly impossible."

Barkman said it can be difficult to distinguish plant species based on photographs alone; "however, the species in question here (giant hogweed, poison hemlock, angelica) are quite simple to distinguish," he said. "The slightly more challenging ones to distinguish between are giant hogweed and cow parsnip (Heracleum mantegazzianum and Heracleum maximum) since they are in the same genus, Heracleum. In this case, it is a bit more like distinguishing between a red and black oak. If they are in full bloom one can distinguish them from a photo because giant hogweed will be about twice as tall. If they are just getting growing, it'd be tough."

A WMU biology class has positively identified these plants growing along the Pine Creek impoundment in Otsego Township as poison hemlock.

Cow parsnip is a native to Michigan but also contains  furanocoumarins, the substances that can lead to the photo-activated dermatitis, he said.

Cow parsnip is relatively uncommon, Barkman said, and giant hogweed even more uncommon, he said.

He has never encountered it on his many forays into the fields, he said.

Barkman said the blisters caused by exposure to giant hogweed don't usually lead to itching, as was described by the dentist who warned of the possibility in the first article.

Barkman's diagnosis? Perhaps dermatitis caused by the poison ivy growing in the area.