

Weed Threatens Local Wildflowers

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Trillium recurvatum, Prairie Trillium, is a woodland wildflower that blooms in May with maroon to dark red colored petals. Directly below the flower, are three strikingly attractive mottled leaves. These plants often form colonies of several dozens plants and are a true delight to be discovered by the nature lover when out for a woodland hike.

This maroon Trillium is endangered in many parts of the country. In Wisconsin, it is considered under special concern. It grows in only a rare few counties of our state. This special plant grows natively, and abundantly, in the Town of Vernon. Herbarium specimens at the University of Wisconsin list the town as the first place of discovery for this plant in Waukesha county. It was first documented here in 1927.

Recently, an exotic weed has been invading our native woodlands and threatening the local wildflower population. The exotic weed is *Alliaria petiolata*, commonly known as Garlic Mustard. When Garlic Mustard is mature, it produces triangle shaped leaves on a stalk that is topped with a cluster of white flowers. Each plant that is allowed to set seed will give rise to as many as 500 seedling next year. The seedlings are lower growing and form different looking round leaves with scalloped margins. Seedlings do not bloom until their second year. Then, 500 mature plants will each produce 500 more seedlings and the weed overwhelms the native woodland vegetation.

If you find just a few Garlic Mustard weeds in your yard, you can easily pull these before they flower and curtail the invasion. Two or three short weeding safaris in your woodlands each year in late April and throughout May will ensure that you can keep this invader under control. Burn these weeds in your fire pit when you burn your brush. Don't simply toss these pulled weeds on your garden compost pile. This weed will still set seed even after it has been killed.

Alternatively, you could place the pulled Garlic Mustard in a clear plastic bag and dispose of this weed in your landfill on your normal trash pickup day. The DNR has granted a special yard waste landfilling exemption for this invasive plant. Label the clear plastic bag, "Invasive Plants - Approved by WI DNR for landfilling".

If your woodland already has hundreds, or thousands, of these weedy plants in it, you can still gain the upper-hand, but it will take much more work. In mid to late April, spray the abundant Garlic Mustard seedlings with a 2% concentration of Round Up or another herbicide containing the chemical glyphosate. Wait 10 days and revisit your treated area and spray the remaining weeds that you missed in your first application. Revisit your treated area again in October, after a killing frost has knocked down the native vegetation, and spray the Garlic Mustard again if you have good weather conditions. Good weather means temperatures above 60 degrees and minimal to no wind.

Most of our native woodland plants are dormant in mid-April and late-October. Whereas Garlic Mustard produces leaves very early in spring, often it is the first plant to leaf out in your woodland. This weed is also semi-evergreen and continues to grow into late fall. Early spring and late fall are two short windows of opportunity when this weed is most vulnerable. Read and follow all label instructions before applying any herbicide. Limit your spraying to just above the targeted weed and keep your nozzle close to the ground. Careless over-spraying will kill all of your woodland vegetation, not just the bad weeds.

The Town of Vernon has begun work on a new weed ordinance that lists Garlic Mustard as a restricted weed. The Town encourages landowners to attempt to control this invasive plant and not allow it to escape to neighboring lands. The Town has begun an educational program where landowners can learn about important weeds in our area and effective ways to control their spread. This article represents part of that effort.

Ultimately, it is up to you whether Garlic Mustard is controlled in your woodland, or whether the native vegetation is destroyed by this plant. Many times we see commercials on television to join in on some environment cause like saving the rain forests. Globally, rain forests are important. Locally, *Trillium recurvatum*, is a special species worthy of protection. In the future, when the children of our children walk the native woodlands in our area, will they have the special opportunity to come across a patch of maroon Trillium. Or will the maroon Trillium become extinct and the woodlands be filled with only Garlic Mustard. What will you tell your great grandchildren when they ask, "Where have all the wildflowers gone?" Only you can answer that.

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