

Queen Anne's Lace

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"Nature knows no difference between weeds and flowers." Mason Cooley

Queen Anne's Lace, also known as wild carrot, is a common roadside wildflower, or weed, depending on your preference. You will find this plant growing around woodland edges, in uncultivated fields, and in ditches all across the United States.



As a wild plant, Queen Anne's Lace is not native to America. As the name suggests, the plant originated in Europe and was introduced to the Americas by early settlers who brought the seed into the country for Victorian gardens and medicinal uses.

Queen Anne, wife of James I, helped to give this plant its common name. The Monarch was a great lace maker and it is true that the flower clusters resemble a white, lacy doily. In the center of the large flower head is a tiny purplish black or deep red floweret. Botanists do not know the nature of this structure but folklore suggests that Queen Anne pricked her finger while making her lace and a small drop of blood fell onto the flower.

Queen Anne's Lace is a biennial plant. This means that the plant spends its first year growing a large tap-root and primary leaves. The second year, the plant flowers, sets seed, and dies. The blooming season is from May through October.

The large, white flower head, or umbel, is typically three to four inches across on three to four foot stalks but can be larger on plants in good soil. Each umbrella shaped cluster is really made up of hundreds of individual flowers that spread out from the central stem.

Queen Anne's Lace can grow up to four feet tall and easily propagates itself with tiny seeds carried by the wind. The seeds themselves have tiny bristles that allow them to catch on passing animals' fur, also. Since this plant was introduced in this country, its prolific nature often leads people to describe this plant as invasive. Indeed, the plant can crowd out its less hearty neighbors. In typical gardens, however, this plant will never take over because it does not tolerate mowing or the constant disturbance of children or pets.

The seed head, or fruit, of Queen Anne's Lace is a spiky mass of the dying flower cluster. As the seeds mature, the umbels fold in upon themselves for protection. The dried flower head resembles a bird's nest.

Many animals benefit from Queen Anne's Lace. The Eastern Black Swallowtail butterfly continues to use this plant as its main host plant. The caterpillars feed on the leaves. Gardeners

who wish to attract this type of butterfly can plant Queen Anne's Lace along with milkweed and thistle. Bees and butterflies feed on the nectar. Birds and other small animals consume the seeds. This plant can entice beneficial insects into your garden.

Because Queen Anne's Lace is an ancestor to our domestic carrot, the root is edible while young and tender. The seeds can be crushed and used as a contraceptive. This last use was documented over 2000 years ago by Hippocrates and has been confirmed by modern scientific studies – the chemicals found in the wild carrot disrupt the implantation process. Other folk remedies include boiling the leaves for a diuretic, a wormer, and a stimulant. Caution should be taken when using herbal remedies as Queen Anne's Lace resembles Poison Hemlock.

Each gardener must decide if he or she has the space and the patience for Queen Anne's Lace. If a decision is made to use Queen Anne's Lace in a garden, start with just a few seeds and scatter seeds sparingly every year. Plant this wildflower in an area away from disturbance. Be diligent in deadheading this plant to control seed dispersion.

*Her lawn looks like a meadow,
And if she mows the place
She leaves the clover standing
And the Queen Anne's lace!*

From "Portrait by a Neighbor" by Edna St. Vincent Millay