



What is it?

Garlic mustard is a biennial (it takes two years to complete its reproductive cycle) herb that was first brought here by European settlers for culinary and medicinal purposes, but now it's a rampant, aggressive, invasive weed that threatens Lincoln's fields, woods, conservation land and neighborhoods.

What does it look like?

First-year plants form a rosette of round or heart-shaped leaves close to the ground that smell like garlic when crushed. Second year plants send up 5-36" tall stems topped by small white flowers that appear in late April/early May. In time, leaves start losing color, the garlic smell fades and the flowers disintegrate, giving way to long, thin seed pods filled with tiny black seeds. After the seeds are dispersed, the plant dies, but the seeds will live on.

Where does it grow?

It prefers the dappled shade of forest edges, and moist, shady areas near water. But it has also adapted to full sun, and now grows along roadsides, train tracks, disturbed soils and many other places.

How does it spread?

One plant can produce up to 6,000 seeds that can remain viable in the soil for up to 7 years! Seeds can be spread by wildlife, dogs, horses, on the bottom of humans' shoes, vehicle tires and mowing equipment. Streams, heavy rain and wind can also carry seeds to new sites. That's why it's crucial to pull plants before they go to seed.

Why is it so bad?

A few plants on your property that go to seed will explode exponentially into a serious infestation over time. It can completely cover an area in 4-5 years if left unchecked, each new plant producing thousands more seeds. Garlic mustard eliminates native plants and stunts the growth of native trees, as it produces a chemical toxic to other plants.

How can you control it?

Pull it as soon as you spot it! It's most effective to remove as many plants as possible in April or May – before they go to seed and spread. They pull out of the ground easily with a gentle tug; make sure to grab the whole root or the plant will re-sprout. For larger areas, cut or mow plants close to ground level before flowers and seeds are produced. You'll have to do this repeatedly, as the plants will try to re-flower again and again. Garlic mustard is tenacious! Rosettes can be pulled and left to dry on the ground in the sun to kill the roots, but don't make a big pile or the roots will stay moist and grow again. Plants with flowers need to be bagged and disposed of – even after you pull them, the plants will still go to seed. Pull them and place directly into a paper yard waste bag.

Help us control this invasive plant. During Lincoln's garlic mustard pull season (mid-April to the end of May), you can drop off filled paper bags at the designated area at the DPW – 2 Lewis Street M-F 7:30-3. You may also drop filled bags in either Conservation truck, located in the Town Hall parking lot. The Conservation Department staff can also pick up your filled paper bags. Just call 781-259-2612 and leave a message with your name, address and number of bags. Leave bags curbside, and allow a few days for pick-up. Visit lincolnconservation.org for Garlic Mustard identification and control videos by LLCT.