

School-to-Nature



Garlic Mustard

Garlic Mustard, an invasive plant, blooms in mid to late spring in our area. It can be found on all Conservancy lands in sunny or partly sunny areas. Our volunteers help to remove as much as possible so that it will not spread. (You're welcome to help too; see the website for info.)

This plant is biennial, blooming in the second year of growth. It's helpful to know what first-year sprouts look like, seen in the photo at the right. Note that the leaves the first year are more rounded. In the second year, plants grow 2-4 feet tall with pointed leaves, and bloom with tiny white flowers bunched at the top and sides of each stalk.



By midsummer, each flower produces seeds that fall nearby, creating a "patch" of these weeds. Garlic Mustard roots secrete a chemical that stops native plants from growing nearby, helping the spread. Beetles and larvae of insects feed on the leaves. The flowers attract bees, flies, butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds.

If you crush or tear the leaves and stems, especially of young plants, you will smell the garlic aroma. This plant was imported from Great Britain for flavoring and as medicine, and it has become established throughout the U.S. It is not only edible but actually very good for you—it's packed with vitamins A and C and has other health benefits, as long as it is not eaten in huge quantities. So go ahead and use the tender leaves in cooking or salads. Medically it was used as a disinfectant, diuretic, or for treatment of liver problems, gangrene, and skin ulcers. Garlic Mustard may be invasive but it's an interesting plant.

March 2022 BH / DL