

Conium L.

Conium maculatum L., POISON HEMLOCK. Biennial herb, taprooted, flat-rosetted (year 1), 1-stemmed at base (year 2) with ascending branches along main axis, erect, in range 50–400 cm tall; shoots airy, with finely dissected basal leaves and cauline leaves, glabrous, strongly musty-scented. **Stems:** cylindric, to 25 mm diameter, striped with \pm 30 pale green strips of fibrous tissue alternating with strips of green tissue, becoming minutely pimpled and forming a dark purplish red spot around each pimple, somewhat glaucous; nodes solid, internodes hollow. **Leaves:** helically alternate, 2–3-odd-pinnately compound and finely pinnately dissected, petiolate forming a conspicuous, partially sheathing sheath, without stipules; petiole 25–280 mm long, \pm cylindric above open sheath, sheath 25–90 mm long, with membranous margins, hollow near blade; blade broadly ovate to triangular in outline, 50–900 mm long; rachis 20–700 mm long, \pm cylindric at base, 5-sided and slightly grooved approaching tip, hollow; lateral axes generally solid (hollow on larger ones), smaller axes compressed side-to-side, grooved near tip; ultimate leaflets finely pinnately lobed with 2–7 lobes per edge, ovate to lanceolate in outline, 12–25 \times 8–20 mm, dark green, each segment ascending, entire or sometimes \pm lobed, acute to 3-toothed and pale green at tip, principal veins sunken on upper surface and raised on lower surface. **Inflorescence:** compound umbel, terminal or lateral and opposite a leaf, slightly domed, 25–90 mm across, typically positioned above leaves, many-flowered, of (6–)12–22 umbellets, umbellets on each plant with either 12–25 bisexual flowers (rarely pistillate flowers), bracteate, glabrous; bract subtending peduncle leaflike, 25–250 \times 10–150 mm, with petiole open entire length; peduncle \pm cylindric but typically 6-ridged, 17–40 mm long, terminating in an involucre; **involucre** of 3–8 whorled bracts subtending primary rays, bracts free, spreading to deflexed, lanceolate to ovate or triangular, 2–6 mm long, green with white margins, acuminate at tip, sometimes expanded at base; primary rays at anthesis 5–10 mm long increasing to 30(–50) mm long in fruit, channeled between 2 ridges; involucre of 2–6 bractlets subtending pedicels, fused below midpoint, bractlets often arranged asymmetrically to 1 side, spreading, narrowly triangular to ovate-lanceolate, 2–4 mm long, white on margins. **Flower:** bisexual, \pm bilateral, 2–3.5 mm across; **sepals** absent; **petals** 5, spreading, unequal, obovate to \pm heart-shaped resulting from incurved acute tip, 0.7–1.6 \times 0.5–1.5 mm, unequal within each flower with 1 petal noticeably larger than others, white, especially the larger ones with midridge on upper (inner) surface; **stamens** 5, free; filaments initially incurved but becoming spreading-decumbent, 1–1.3 mm long (if pistillate < 0.4 mm long), whitish, tapered from base to tip; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, 0.3–0.7 mm long (if pistillate < 0.2 mm long and colorless), whitish to pale yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen pale yellow; **pistil** 1; ovary inferior, 2-lobed, with a platform (stylopodium, styler tissue) on top, \pm hemispheric and slightly compressed side-to-side, \pm 0.7 \times 0.7–1 mm, green, 10-ribbed, 2-chambered, each chamber with 1 ovule; styles 2, fingerlike, greenish white to grayish white, tips diverging and < 0.3 mm long. **Fruit:** schizocarp, of 2 dry, 1-seeded halves (= mericarps), splitting between mericarps upon drying bottom to top (from carpophore), broadly ovoid, 2–3.2 \times 1.7–2.4 mm (incl. persistent stylopodium), slightly compressed; mericarps \pm lanceoloid, 5-ribbed on outer faces, flat and grooved on inner face, dull dark brown, glabrous, ribs prominent, light

brown; carpophore = fruit length, split entire length, attached to mericarps at tip, fitting into groove on inner face of mericarp. Early March–late July.

Naturalized. Biennial herb encountered throughout the range, especially near the coast or in relatively wet habitats near drainages and creeks, where dense local populations form. *Conium maculatum* is musty-scented, white-flowered poison hemlock; it resembles in stature and form the distant relative fennel, *Foeniculum vulgare*, which has yellow flowers. *Conium maculatum* was so named because its stems have dark purplish red spots (maculate). Occasionally one can find an individual with only pistillate flowers, in which the stamens are diminutive.

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