

APRIL 2011

## STEVE'S

# Weed of the Month

## Bur chervil/Wild chervil

**Also Known As:** burr chervil, bur-chervil, cow parsley, keck

**Bur chervil** Non-native species that are either absent from or limited in distribution in some portions of the state but very abundant in other areas. The goals are to **contain** the plants where they are already widespread and **prevent** their spread into new areas.

**Bur chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis* M. Bieb.)** and **wild chervil (*Anthriscus sylvestris* L.)**, native to Europe, are biennials or short-lived perennials belonging to the carrot family (Apiaceae). The plants reproduce by seed. The first year, the plants form rosettes and store energy in roots. When mature, the roots are thick, tuberous and aggressive; the tap roots can extend over 6 feet deep. The following spring the plant uses the stored energy to bolt, producing a flower stalk. After flowering and seed set, the plant dies. Bur chervil is generally smaller than wild chervil, averaging 2 feet tall compared to wild chervil's 3–4 feet average height. The stems of the plants are hollow, branched and hairy near the base. Alternately arranged leaves are finely divided (fern-like) and form triangular shapes. Small white flowers with 5 petals are borne in umbels (umbrella-like clusters) at the top of stems. Wild chervil has bract-like leaves that surround the base of the umbel (bur chervil does not). Each of the small flowers bears 2 shiny brown seeds. The seeds of wild chervil are joined with small antenna-like structures at the top, while the 2 clasped seeds of bur chervil are covered with velcro-like bristles, forming burrs that attach to equipment, clothing and fur.



Photo by: Joseph M DiTomaso,  
University of Cal-Davis, Bugwood.org

Bur and wild chervil are highly adaptable and can be found along roadsides and in pastures, open woods, waste places and disturbed areas. Both plant species are aggressive competitors for light, water and nutrients and can displace native vegetation, often forming monocultures.



Photo by: John M Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org



Photo by: Joseph M DiTomaso, University of California-Davis, Bugwood.org



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## Control Methods

Bur and wild chervil contain toxins that can cause skin irritation; therefore, it is prudent to wear protective clothing when handling these plants. Because of their regenerative ability and aggressive growth habit, an integrated approach using a combination of control methods will likely be necessary for successful control.

**Cultural Control:** Whichever control methods are selected, reseeding with beneficial species is important to provide competition and make the area less prone to re-infestation. Also, beware that chervil seeds can be included in wildflower seed mixes so avoid using any questionable mixes.

**Physical/Mechanical Control:** Small populations of chervil can be removed by hand-pulling or digging when the soil is moist, which makes it easier to remove the entire root system—important in preventing resprouting. It is best to bag all plant remains and remove them from the infested area. Monitoring will be necessary to remove any new growth. If mowing is a desired control method (generally not recommended for these chervil species), it must occur before seed set and repeated often so that seed production is prevented. Tillage can be used during the dry months (but before seed set) to uproot the roots so that they dry out and are unable to sprout; for optimal effectiveness, tillage should be combined with herbicide treatments.

**Chemical Control:** Several readily available herbicides have been used to control wild and bur chervil. Among these are clopyralid, glyphosate, chlorsulfuron + metsulfuron. Other herbicides can be used for control but you must read the label to see if the herbicide is labeled for bur chervil control.

**More information can be found in the  
[PNW Weed Management Handbook](#)**

**Use pesticides with care.** Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

**Biological Control:** There are no biological control agents available, although grazing can be incorporated into a management plan

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