



NATALIE ST. JOHN — EO Media Group

Debbie Haugsten cares for some of the flowering plants in her large greenhouse near Klipsan Beach.

in the garden

Q&A

with

Debbie Haugsten

Q: Tell us about your greenhouse and the advantages it provides your gardening?

A: My greenhouse is a true sanctuary for me. I love being surrounded by the foliage and flowers. The big advantage of having a greenhouse for me is being able to propagate with cuttings and seeds with the luxury of protection and climate control. I also use it for overwin-

tering some of my plants like my collection of geraniums. And I can work in the greenhouse in the pouring rain.

Q: What has been your biggest gardening success?

A: I would say my biggest gardening success is growing plants from cuttings and seeds and then watching them flourish in my garden. I have grown a complete hedge of shrubs from cuttings. Propagating plants is almost magical to me.

Q: What part of your personality is reflected in your garden?

A: My gardens are eclectic and diverse just like the interior of my home. I plant what I love and do not concern myself with balance and symmetry. My gardens exhibit many different textures, shapes and colors, especially with my flowers. I am slowly cultivating a good group of perennial flowers that return every year — another bit of the magic for me.

Q: Describe the pleasure you gain from working in your garden.

A: I have always loved gardening even as a small

child. I do so enjoy being outdoors in my own yard planting, cleaning up, and — yes — weeding. I don't like to weed but after an area has been weeded I feel I have accomplished something great. And my husband says that when I finish gardening for the day I look like I have been rolling around in the dirt with our dog — so that's proof positive that I am having fun.

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Q: What's the most recent gardening book you've read that you would recommend?

A: "Back in the Garden with Dulcy" by Ted Mahar is a wonderful collaboration of gardening columns from The Oregonian by the late Dulcy Mahar. Dulcy's columns talk of her adventures in gardening in the Pacific Northwest, including gardening advice and some hilarious stories of her gardening successes and

failures.

Debbie Haugsten, whose hobbies include gardening and jewelry making, became a member of the Clatsop County Master Gardeners Association in 2008. She is also a member of the Peninsula Arts Association. She is married to Dave Haugsten and their family includes Ralph, a Golden Retriever.

Poison hemlock often mistaken for edible plants

'If you're wrong, you're in big trouble,' expert warns

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

WASHINGTON STATE — So far this year, the Washington Poison Center has treated 10 people who have eaten poison hemlock, an invasive weed found throughout the Pacific Northwest that can easily be mistaken for an edible plant.

Though the reported numbers are average for any given year, not all incidents are reported and the 10 cases as of mid-May could be just the tip of the iceberg, said Dr. Alexander Garrard, the center's toxicologist and clinic managing director.

Poison hemlock, or *Conium maculatum*, is not related to the hemlock tree, but can be deadly. There is no antidote for the toxic alkaloids in poison hemlock, although the effects can be managed through supportive care. All of the plant's parts can kill humans and animals, even when dried, and it can easily be mistaken for more benign members of the carrot or parsley family (Apiaceae), including wild carrot (Queen Anne's lace), parsley, parsnip, sweet cicely, anise, fennel, wild chervil and caraway, as well as



Courtesy of William & Wilma Follette/US-DA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Poison hemlock is a common plant in western Washington state, with accidental poisonings most likely to occur in the spring when it most closely resembles several other plant species, some of which may be gathered for food by foragers.

the toxic Western water hemlock, or watercress, which is in another family.

In spring, a lot of these plants' leaves, flowers and seeds look similar, making it even more difficult for foragers and gardeners to figure out if

what they're about to add to a salad is delicious or deadly.

"If you're not a botanist ... I mean, you could give it to me and in the lab we could look at it under a microscope and tell you definitively," said Cindy Riskin, master of environmental horticulture, who wrote a press release for the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board warning the public of the dangers of misidentifying poison hemlock.

Outside of a lab, though, foragers really only get to be wrong once about poison hemlock, Riskin said. "If you're wrong, you're in big trouble."

Widespread plant

Poison hemlock is widespread in Washington state, growing along stream banks and roadsides, in vacant lots and construction sites, especially where the soil is moist. It even creeps into gardens. One person died in 1999 in Washington after eating the plant, and another died in 2010. The Greek philosopher Socrates famously killed himself by drinking poison-hemlock tea in 399 B.C. after being accused of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state and "corrupting the youth."

In Washington in 2012, approximately 17 people were reported to have been exposed to poison hemlock — a high number regional newspapers ascribed to the rising popularity of forag-

ing for wild, edible plants.

Once eaten, however, poison hemlock quickly reveals itself to be much more than an attractive-looking salad green. The toxic alkaloids attack the nervous system, causing symptoms such as a burning sensation in the mouth, nausea, vomiting, confusion, rapid heartbeat, seizures and paralysis. For some people, even touching the plant may cause a severe skin reaction. People die from eating poison hemlock due to respiratory paralysis.

One Bellingham-area man chopped up poison hemlock with garlic, carrots and onions in 2013, according to local news reports. Minutes after eating a small amount he said tremors began to run throughout his entire body. He spent four hours in the emergency room and felt fatigued for days afterward, but suffered no long-term damage. A representative of the Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board said he was lucky.

"Misidentifying poison hemlock or other toxic plants can have truly tragic results," said Alison Halpern, executive secretary of the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board in a statement this month. "Learn from an expert before foraging for wild plants, and if you think you have poison hemlock on your property, contact your county weed board, conservation district or WSU Extension office to learn how to safely get rid of it."

Appearance changes

As the poison hemlock continues to grow, it has more recognizable features though it is still all too easy to mistake it for something else. Telltale characteristics include purple spots on a smooth, hairless hollow stem that grows 2 to 12 feet tall accompanied by a musty smell. During its first year, it resembles a rosette of glossy, fernlike leaves and its stem may or may not show purple. In its second year, the poison hemlock produces umbrella-shaped clusters of white flowers which develop into ridged seeds. Wild carrot, for which it is often mistaken, is usually only 3 feet tall or less and produces one dense flower cluster on a narrow, hairy stem, sometimes with a purple flower in the center.

To any would-be foragers, Riskin advises to proceed with caution, go with a botanist or experienced forager, harvest any plant carefully, and check various identification guides. If there is any question about whether or not the plant is safe, leave it alone, Riskin said. Mushroom foragers are always encouraged to only eat small amounts of wild mushrooms at a time since different people can react differently even to wild mushrooms generally considered safe.

For a general guide to plants that produce lacy, white flowers — such as poison hemlock — here is a handy guide: www.nwplants.com/information/white_flowers/white_comparison.html

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NEWS
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NEWS
Tessie Muller and OR head work with aquaculture page 21

BOAT OF THE MONTH
The new boat of the month page 24

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