

Queen Anne's Lace



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Queen Anne's lace, *Daucus carota* (Family Apiaceae), is a common sight in dry fields, roadside ditches and open areas. There are many explanations for the origin of this common name, including the flower's resemblance to the lace that was fashionable around the time of the British monarch, wife of King James I; because people thought it resembled Queen Anne's lace headdress; 18th-century English courtiers used the flowers as "living lace;" and supposedly because Queen Anne challenged her ladies-in-waiting to a contest to see who could

produce a piece of lace as beautiful as the flower, but none could rival her own efforts.

It is also called wild carrot, because this is the European plant that cultivated carrots were developed from. It was brought to North America with the colonists as a medicinal plant and is now naturalized throughout the continent.

The roots are high in vitamin A and the juice is purported to be a diuretic, expel intestinal parasites, and have anti-cancer properties. Teas made from various parts of the plants were traditionally used for numerous ailments including kidney disease, scurvy, and diabetes, but have since been shown to have no medical efficacy.



Leaf of the Queen Anne's lace plant.



Seedling *Daucus carota*.

Seeds germinate throughout the growing season, producing a small rosette of ferny green leaves. The finely divided alternate leaves are tri-pinnate (the feather-like leaflets are again divided) and the lower leaves are considerably larger than the upper ones. The plant also produces a firm, yellowish, spindly taproot. Although the root is edible when young (but not tasty like its cultivated relatives), the leaves can cause skin irritation in some people, especially those sensitive to celery or chrysanthemums. There are similar looking plants such as poison hemlock or fool's parsley (*Conium maculatum*) and water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*) that are poisonous, so care must be taken not to confuse them if collecting wild plant to eat the roots.



A Queen Anne's lace flower opens from a small bud.

This biennial flowers in its second season, then dies. Hollow branched flower stems grow two to four feet tall, and both the stems and leaves are covered with short, coarse hairs. The attractive, airy two- to four-inch "flower" is actually a compound flower. Up to a thousand tiny white flowers are produced in lacy, flat-topped clusters (umbels) with a dark, purplish center.

As the seeds ripen, the inflorescence curls inward to form a "bird's nest" shape and turns a brownish color. A small bristly seed is produced at the end of each flower stalk, and once dry they readily latch onto fur or feathers to be disseminated beyond where the seeds would otherwise fall.



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A small bristly seed is produced at the end of each flower stalk. The prickly seeds readily latch onto fur or feathers.

Queen Anne's lace is at home in informal settings and is a natural addition to a wildflower meadow – often showing up uninvited. It combines nicely with black-eyed Susan, coreopsis, and butterfly weed. The flowers of this plant make good cut flowers and is a nice filler in arrangements with other flowers. They do not dry well when hung up, but can be pressed to preserve the blooms.

D. carota is very adept at self-seedling, but should you wish to propagate this plant, collect the seeds once they have dried up and turned brown, then scatter them where you want the plants to grow either in fall or spring. Seedlings might be mistaken for grass seedlings at first, as the cotyledons are linear, but the next set of leaves is more distinctive. With its long taproot, this plant does not transplant well. It is tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions, including heavy clay.



Queen Anne's Lace is so adaptable that in some habitats it crowds out native species that can't compete with its vigorous growth. Many people consider Queen Anne's lace an invasive weed (it is listed as a noxious weed in at least 35 states), but it is used by some native animals for food. It is a host plant for eastern black swallowtail caterpillars and many butterflies and adult bees and beneficial insects utilize the flower nectar. To reduce the spread of this plant, remove the seedheads before they mature.

– Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Additional Information:

- ▶ PLANTS Profile: *Daucus carota* L., Queen Anne's lace – in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Plants Database at plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=DACA6
- ▶ Wild Carrot - Queen Annes Lace – on the World Carrot Museum website at www.carrotmuseum.co.uk/queen.html