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Wicked Weeds ~ Garlic Mustard

By Judith Mimbela, Sunnyside Master Gardener

Nutritional, Medicinal, and INVASIVE

If you attended the May 1 SMG monthly meeting, you enjoyed hearing Thomas Smarr, Director of Horticulture and Natural Areas of The Parklands. Among many interesting insights, he mentioned "garlic mustard" – and said it was "tasty"! Research shows me that garlic mustard is both nutritional and medicinal. GM has high amounts of Vitamin C and A, close to kale, broccoli, and brussels sprouts. GM has 3 to 4 times more vitamin C than an orange (190 mg of C per 100 g of tissue). The most common use is in a pesto.

Try this: blanched GM leaves, olive oil and cheese (asiago or swiss) in a food processor. You can add pine nuts or hazelnuts if you like, and voila – a delicious pesto.

In addition, GM is reported to be anti-asthmatic, antiseptic, and deobstruent. It's been used to treat bronchitis, asthma, and eczema. The leaves have been used as an antiseptic poultice on ulcers and are effective in relieving the itching caused by bites and stings.

OK, that's the good news. The not so good news: the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society considers garlic mustard (*Alliara petiolate*) one of the ten most destructive invasive species in Indiana today. It is very difficult to eradicate once it is established in an area. It spreads rapidly and unfortunately displaces native or other desired plants in a relatively short period of time. Throughout Indiana, it is a particular threat to spring wildflowers, overtopping and shading them out. Compared to the diversity of plants it eliminates, it provides little food for wildlife. GM has a biennial life cycle. Each plant can produce thousands of seeds which can be spread by wildlife, humans, and water. All plants that survive the winter produce flowers in their second year and then die. In that second year the plant will shoot straight up into a tall, slender flower with clusters of small white, four-petal flowers.

Fortunately for us, we have options to rid ourselves of this pest of a plant (unless you want to harvest it for cooking). Eradicating GM is easy, but takes time. Lots of time. The goal is to remove every plant until the existing seed bank is depleted. This may take 2 – 5 years in a confined area. For larger areas, controlled burns or herbicides may be the solution.

For those with a scientific mind set, Kristina Stinson of Harvard University explains that "*Alliaria petiolate*, a European invader of North American forests, suppresses native plant growth by disrupting mutualistic associations between native canopy tree seedlings and belowground arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi." She continues with "garlic mustard's successful colonization of understory habitat may be attributed in part to its ability to indirectly suppress woody competitors, and it effect on the native flora may be more detrimental in intact forests than disturbed sites."

Thanks for reading and if you try the recipe, let us know!

References:

- CAPS (Indiana Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Program. Purdue University. Site author Christopher Pierce, Ph.D. 10.29.2013
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- Harvard Forest, Harvard University, Petersham, Massachusetts, USA. Kristina A. Stinson. May 2006