



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226  
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## GARLIC MUSTARD

### *Alliaria petiolata*

**THREAT:** Garlic mustard, a plant native to Europe, was probably introduced to North America in the 1800s, for use as a medicinal and food plant. Unlike many problem weeds, garlic mustard is shade tolerant and can successfully invade forest habitats. It usually gains access through disturbed areas, such as stream banks disturbed by flooding, roadsides, trails or campgrounds. Garlic mustard produces large numbers of seeds and is self-pollinating, which allows a single plant to quickly produce enough plants to dominate a site. Seeds are dispersed primarily by humans and other animals and can persist in the soil for at least five years. In forested areas where it has become established, garlic mustard can dominate the ground vegetation.

**DESCRIPTION:** Garlic mustard is a biennial herb, which can grow over three feet tall. The first year plants consist of a rosette of rounded green leaves, which persist over winter. The taproot of this plant often grows horizontally near the soil surface before growing downwards. In the spring of its second year, garlic mustard sends up an unbranched flowering stalk with alternate heart-shaped or triangular leaves. The small white flowers are borne in a cluster at the end of the stem. Like other mustards, the flower has four petals in the form of a cross. When crushed, the leaves and stem of this plant give off a distinctive garlic odor. Garlic mustard prefers moist, shady sites, although it can tolerate full sun and various soil moistures. It does not seem to tolerate highly acidic soils.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Several management options are available to control garlic mustard, however, repeated treatments are necessary with all. For small infestations, handpulling is effective, as long as the entire root system is removed. Cutting the stems at ground level just before or during flowering (but before seed set) results in high mortality. Certain herbicides may also be used. For some sites, fall or early spring burning may be effective. All these treatments require follow-up work to remove any surviving plants before they have the opportunity to set seed.

