

Wild cucumber

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Wild cucumber, *Echinocystis lobata*, is an annual vine native to North America, including some Atlantic provinces such as New Brunswick. However, records suggest that it was introduced to PEI as a trellis plant for screens. Wild cucumber plants can reach lengths of 8 meters in short periods. It is a member of the Cucurbitaceae family and has similar features to its domesticated and edible relative, the cucumber, *Cucumis sativus*. However, wild cucumber fruit is not edible.



Some people consider wild cucumber as an attractive plant and use it as an ornamental. Unfortunately, it can become a nuisance and some consider it a weed. The plant can display aggressive growth habits. Wild cucumber plants prefer habitats with relative higher

moisture. It is most often found near ponds, streams, and moist meadows. If conditions are right, the vine can grow in typically dry areas, if higher levels of rainfall are observed. Wild cucumber plants climb up walls, trees, and other vertical surfaces. If wrapped around other vegetation such as trees or shrubs, it can smother those plants and reduce the amount of light they receive. If this happens for multiple seasons, perennial vegetation may be permanently affected.



The leaves of wild cucumber are nearly as wide as they are long, up to 18 cm across, with five star-shaped triangular lobes, resembling a maple leaf. The leaves have an alternate leaf arrangement and they have tiny widely spaced teeth around the edges.

The stems are angled, hairless, and have branching tendrils that wrap around other vegetation. Wild cucumber plants have both male and female flowers on the same plant with greenish white petals covered in short hairs. The seed pods are oval and grow up to 5 cm long and, as mentioned earlier, they are not edible. The seed pods are covered with sharp spines that burst open to disperse the seeds when ripe.



The best and easiest way to control wild cucumber is to hoe or pull the plants as soon as they are noticed in the spring. The Prince Edward Island Invasive Species Council recommends using a stirrup hoe (also known as a Dutch hoe) for this task. The stirrup hoe makes removing of the plants easier at an early stage.

This prevents the wild cucumber from getting large enough to damage other plants through shading and prevents development of seed pods. When the plants get to be more than 60 cm tall, cutting the vines at the base of the plant works well. This will also prevent the plant from dispersing by seed.

Monitoring the area may be necessary in case more trimming is needed. Persistent pulling and cutting is

the most effective way to deplete the seed bank and eventually get rid of wild cucumber in the area.

When pulling plants you can discard them in the area only if there are no seed pods present. Make sure there are no seed pods. If there are seed pods, discard of them safely – not in a compost pile and do not leave them in the area. Contact Island Waste Management for directions on how to dispose of wild cucumber at their facilities. If the plants are detected later in the season, they can be mowed repeatedly to keep them in check.



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