

Wild Garlic Abounds In Farm Fields

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Many people have noticed that quite a few farm fields have a distinctive blue-green cast. Some have also observed wheat fields receiving spray applications. There is a connection – it is the weedy plant commonly known as Wild Garlic.

The life cycle of wild garlic is that of a cool-season herbaceous perennial. Reproduction is mainly from aerial bulblets, although underground bulblets are produced. Many bulblets sprout in the fall, however, some may not emerge until spring. Plants mature during late May and early June and become dormant in late July.

Wild garlic is a troublesome weed in wheat fields in many parts of Illinois. These bulblets can remain dormant in the soil for several years and are a contaminant of small grains, resulting in possible quality issues and price discounts. Wild garlic can also cause off-flavor in the milk produced from animals feeding on infested grain. Wild garlic tends not to be a problem in cultivated row crops, although it may be present.

Wild garlic can be distinguished from similar

plants such as Star-of-Bethlehem and wild onion by its nearly hollow stem. In addition, wild garlic has underground bulblets not found in the other species. Wild onion plants do have the distinctive onion odor. Star-of-Bethlehem, believed to be an escaped ornamental, has very little fragrance. Bryan Young, SIU Carbondale, has done research on Star-of-Bethlehem control and has an on-line fact sheet at <http://www.siu-weeds.com/publications/Star%20of%20Bethlehem.pdf>

Tillage, where possible, will help control actively growing garlic plants. Herbicidal control is usually required on small grain fields.

Here are some interesting facts about wild garlic:

- It is a member of the Liliaceae (lily) family.
- Wild garlic is believed to be introduced from Europe in the 1700s.
- Allyl sulfide is the chemical responsible for garlic's disagreeable odor.
- Garlic flowers are pollinated by bumble bees.
- Native Americans used wild garlic for medicinal purposes.
- Wild garlic is a state-listed endangered plant in New Hampshire. (Yes, I know that you will be happy to send a fresh supply.) Δ

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