

# wall lettuce fact sheet



## What is it?

Wall lettuce is an annual herb in the dandelion family that has come to our attention in Lincoln recently and is poised to spread its seeds all over town in summer. Once it gets started, it's hard to stop.

## Where does it come from?

Originally from Southern Europe, the Mediterranean, and western Asia. It's invasive in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest and has been spotted in Maine, New Hampshire and now Massachusetts.

## What does it look like?

It looks and acts a lot like a common dandelion - it has pointy, dandelion-like leaves, stems that exude a milky sap when plucked, bright yellow flowers followed by hundreds and thousands of wispy seeds per plant that are transported long distances by the wind. You can tell the difference between dandelion greens and wall lettuce leaves by the leaf tip - wall lettuce has a larger triangular leaf tip that is larger than its other lobes; dandelions have a rounded or slightly-pointed tip. Unlike dandelions, wall lettuce flowers grow on a straight, 2-3-foot-tall stem, with leaves growing primarily near the base of the plant. Dandelions have large, round, puffy golden flowers that appear in May; wall lettuce flowers are tiny, five-petaled, light yellow flowers that form in June, then shrivel and produce white seeds with their own 'parachutes' that fly away in the breeze.

## Where does it grow?

We're finding it in the deep shade of forests, but It can also adapt to full sun settings. It can handle drought or tolerate frost. It likes the same conditions as garlic mustard, so look for it wherever you pull garlic mustard.

## How does it spread?

By airborne seeds that are carried on the wind to far-away places. Sometimes wall lettuce acts like an annual, dying off after flowering and dispersing its seed, but other times it acts like a biennial - with the new seeds forming a rosette of spiky green leaves this year that will turn into a flowering plant next summer.

## Why is it so bad?

Because it spreads so many seeds so far. Plants in the shade can produce 500 seeds per plant, and researchers found that plants in the sun can produce up to 11,000 seeds per plant! Seeds can stay viable for 2 years. So wall lettuce can quickly take over an area of land in a couple of seasons. We've seen it go from a few plants in an area one year to carpeting woodlands, mulched shrub and flower beds, bare spots in lawns, and mossy areas. We fear this weed will spread into our unmanaged woodland habitats and dominate - with disastrous effects. We need everyone to look out for it and pull it.

## How can you control it?

It's easy to pull it once you know how to spot it. Wear gloves, since the milky sap can irritate some people's skin. Pull gently and firmly by the base of the stem and it should pop out; or use a trowel if you need leverage. If the plant has a flower or wispy seed heads, pull them off and put in a plastic bag for disposal; the rest of the plant can be composted, left on the ground to dry, or placed in a black plastic bag or a tarp to prevent re-growth.

For more info go to [www.lincolnconservation.org](http://www.lincolnconservation.org)