

## Queen Anne's Lace

by Sally Cureton

A lacey flower known as Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*) is one of the more common flowers on the roadsides in Massanutten Village and around the Shenandoah Valley right now. The plant itself grows to about 2-4 feet tall with tiny white flowers in round flat-topped clusters 4-6 inches across called umbrels. The word umbrel comes from the same root as umbrella. There is often one dark purple or black center flower and its fern-like leaves can grow to be up to eight inches long.

Queen Anne's Lace originated in Europe and is also known as "Wild Carrot." The carrots that we eat today originated with this plant. In fact its taproot can be eaten. It blooms from May to October and is what is known as a biennial plant, meaning that it lives for two years. The first year it spends growing and then blooms the second year. It really is a beautiful plant but is considered a pest in some parts of North America, since it spreads quickly and can take over a field. Some animals have benefited from this plant such as bees and other insects. Caterpillars of the Eastern Black Swallowtail butterfly eat the leaves.

A related plant, known as Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) is the most common flower among the members of the carrot family. It has a white umbrel of flowers similar to that of Queen Anne's Lace, which will be 4-8 inches when it blooms. Its leaves differ from Queen Anne's Lace. They are large, even huge, maple-like and can be up to 20 inches long. The stalk of the plant can be up to 10 feet in height. I once heard a Park Ranger describe Cow Parsnip as Queen Anne's Lace on steroids. The young stem and shoots of this plant can be eaten raw or cooked and have a flavor somewhat like asparagus. A native of North America, this plant was used by the American Indians for a variety of ailments. It is not used much in modern herbalism, except occasionally in the treatment of laryngitis and bronchitis.

Both plants may cause a skin irritation. Also, it is important to be aware that there is a similar-looking plant, called Water Hemlock which is extremely poisonous. The general caution is to not to attempt to eat either Queen Anne's Lace or Cow Parsnip unless an expert has identified it. In addition, the foliage is poisonous to livestock.