CORVALLIS - The snowy heads of Queen Anne's lace line country lanes in summer. The familiar wildflower, also known as wild carrot, has been spreading rapidly in many areas of Oregon, and distributions are no longer limited to roadside ditches and field borders, according to Jed Colquhoun weed scientist with Oregon State University Extension Service.

Queen Anne's lace is becoming problematic in crops ranging from wheat to Christmas trees, as well as in yards and gardens, says Colquhoun.

The finely cut foliage of wild carrot grows from a slender taproot that emits a carrot-like odor when cut. In the second growing season, a bristly flower stalk arises from the basal rosette, with lacy flower clusters that can contain more than 1,000 tiny white flowers. In the middle of the cluster is a single red flower, the storied drop of blood spilled by Queen Anne as she tatted the lacy cap.

Wild carrot is widely distributed throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. It is most prolific in areas with annual precipitation ranging from 32 to 40 inches and with at least 120 consecutive frost-free days, which makes it quite at home throughout much of western Oregon. Vigor and seed production decrease with increased shading, to the point where heavily shaded wild carrots become short-lived perennials.

In most places, wild carrot is a biennial that reproduces by seed. As with all weeds, preventing the spread of seed will help control infestations. Colquhoun has found that wild carrot does not survive in fields that are tilled every year. Grazing, however, is relatively ineffective because only the foliage is grazed and the less palatable secondary stalks survive to flower and set seed.

Wild carrot management with herbicides is also difficult, in part because germination occurs throughout most of the year. Colquhoun has monitored wild carrot emergence in more than a dozen field locations in the Willamette Valley and found seeds sprouting continuously throughout the winter.

According to Colquhoun, the best way to control wild carrot in the garden is to hoe or pull first year seedlings, when they are young and easily removed prior to seed production. In lawns, it is most important to maintain a healthy, competitive turf that will prevent troublesome weeds from becoming established.