

31. CONIUM Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 1: 243. 1753.

毒参属 du shen shu

Pan Zehui (潘泽惠); Mark F. Watson

Herbs, biennial or shortly perennial, slender. Root stout, long-conic. Stem hollow, erect, much-branched above, conspicuously purple-spotted. Leaves petiolate, narrowly sheathing at base; blade 2–3-pinnate, finely dissected. Umbels numerous, terminal and lateral on dichotomous branches; bracts and bracteoles several, often reflexed; rays numerous, ascending; rays numerous, spreading widely. Calyx teeth obsolete. Petals white or yellowish white, obovate or obcordate, apex incurved. Stylopodium low-conic, styles short, reflexed. Fruit ovoid or broad-ovoid, slightly flattened laterally; ribs 5, prominent, all ridged to very narrowly sinuate-winged; vittae small, numerous, completely encircling the seed, usually broken down in mature fruit. Seed face deeply concave or sulcate. Carpophore 2-cleft, at least to middle.

About six species: native to the Mediterranean region, widely naturalized in the N temperate zone; one species (introduced) in China.

1. *Conium maculatum* Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 1: 243. 1753.

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Plants 80–200(–300) cm, essentially glabrous. Basal leaves on long-petioles, petioles 7–25 cm, sheaths small, narrow; blades 2–3-pinnate, 10–30 × 6–28 cm, finely divided; pinnae petiolulate; ultimate segments oblong or ovate-lanceolate, 1–3 × 0.5–1 cm, short-petiolate, incised or pinnatifid. Leaves gradually reduced upwards. Umbels 4–7 cm across, lateral umbels overtopping the terminal; peduncles 2–7 cm; bracts 4–6,

ovate-lanceolate, acuminate, 2–5 mm, reflexed; rays 10–20, 1.5–4 cm, unequal; bracteoles 5–6, ovate, 1.5–3 mm, fused at base; pedicels 10–20, 1–5 mm, unequal. Petals ca. 1.5 × 1 mm. Fruit 2–4 × 1.5–2.5 mm. Fl. and fr. May–Aug. $n = 11$.

Forest margins, cultivated field margins. Xinjiang [native to the Mediterranean region, widely naturalized in the N temperate zone].

This notorious plant (hemlock) was famously used to kill Socrates. All part of the plants are poisonous (containing toxic alkaloids, $C_8H_{17}N$), but can be used medicinally to relieve pain and reputedly as a cancer cure.

