



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
To: New Tecumseth Times

How to control Giant Hogweed from invading your property

By: Nicole Gibson, NVCA/Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

UTOPIA, Ontario, July 31, 2009 – Giant Hogweed has arrived in the Nottawasaga Valley watershed and without some control measures, it will be here to stay... and spread. But before you remove this invasive species from your yard, beware because Hogweed can pose a serious health risk.

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is an invasive species native to Asia. It was likely introduced to North America as an ornamental garden plant but has escaped into the wild. The plant has a clear sap containing furocoumarins, which it secretes when its leaves, stems or bristles are broken. The sap can cause skin to become more sensitive to UV radiation. The result can be painful blistering and dermatitis where the sap comes into contact with skin, or permanent blindness if the sap comes in contact with eyes.

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) has recorded Hogweed in the townships of Adjala-Tosorontio and Essa, as well as the towns of Collingwood and Mono. The plant is able to live in a variety of habitats but is generally found in moist soils. It is often seen along roadside ditches, stream banks and vacant lots.

Giant Hogweed resembles some of our native species, such as Angelica, Queen Anne's Lace and Cow parsnip. However, it can grow up to five metres tall and has an herbaceous stem five to 10 centimetres in diameter. The stem and leaf stalks are covered with coarse hairs, and are often purple-spotted. Hogweed also produces a white umbrella-shaped flower from June to July which will create large, flat, oval seeds.



The plant spreads when its seeds are carried short distances by the wind, wildlife, human activity, or by floating downstream in rivers to colonize new areas.

There are several methods used to eradicate Giant Hogweed but proper precautions must be taken to avoid human contact with the plant's sap. Full-length clothing, gloves and closed-toe shoes should be worn, and a face mask/shield is recommended while undertaking control measures.

Weed whackers and mowing are not recommended as they can cause the phototoxic sap to spray into the air, exposing the operator to potential injury. Burning is similarly not recommended.

Member Municipalities

Adjala-Tosorontio

Amaranth

Barrie

The Blue Mountains

Bradford-West Gwillimbury

Clearview

Collingwood

Essa

Innisfil

Melancthon

Mono

Mulmur

New Tecumseth

Oro-Medonte

Grey Highlands

Shelburne

Springwater

Wasaga Beach

Watershed Counties

Simcoe

Dufferin

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Hand-pulling can be effective for small infestations. Removed plants must be double or triple-bagged in garbage bags (clear works best but black is also suitable) and laid out in the sun to liquefy for a minimum of one week before disposing of them in the trash. Do not compost the plants after this process.

Larger infestations can be treated with the herbicide Roundup. Under the new Cosmetic Pesticide Ban, landowners are able to use Roundup to control poisonous plants on their own property. An initial application is best applied between March and early June, with a second application in July or August to kill any remaining plants. The herbicide should only be sprayed when there is no wind and it should be avoided near water. Be sure to follow all the label directions and thoroughly wash all equipment afterwards.

The NVCA is also experimenting with removing the plant from a public area by using a mixture of vinegar, soap and salt. To date, results have been positive, with leaves wilting or burning off. But the experiment is in its beginning stages and more time is needed to determine its effectiveness. Staff hope to return to the site in the spring to heavily mulch over new seedlings.

Continued monitoring of sites where Hogweed has been spotted and removed is crucial. Seeds can be viable for seven to 15 years so it is important to remove newly germinating plants.

If you spot Giant Hogweed in the Nottawasaga Valley watershed, please contact Nicole Gibson at the NVCA so the conservation authority can map infestations and track if and where the plant is spreading. Please call (705) 424-1479, ext. 261, or email ngibson@nvca.on.ca. Giant Hogweed may also be reported to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters Invading Species Awareness Program through the website www.invadingspecies.com or by calling their hotline at 1-800-563-7711.

For more information on Giant Hogweed, please visit www.nvca.on.ca and refer to the NVCA's fact sheet. The NVCA lists these options for controlling Giant Hogweed as suggestions only and does not assume responsibility for any health issues that may arise from landowners coming into contact with Giant Hogweed. If you believe you have been exposed to Giant Hogweed sap, cover up the affected areas and keep them out of direct sunlight. Wash the affected areas immediately with soap and cold water, and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

- 30 -

About the NVCA

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority is a public agency dedicated to the preservation of a healthy environment through specialized programs to protect, conserve and enhance our water, wetlands, forests and lands.

For media inquiries regarding Giant Hogweed, please contact:
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(705) 424-1479, ext. 242
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