



Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

Where does giant hogweed come from?

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a plant native to Asia. It was likely introduced to North America as an ornamental garden plant. With no known diseases or insect enemies to control it here in Canada, the plant has escaped into the wild and spread, becoming an invasive species that threatens our natural ecosystems.

What does it look like?

Giant hogweed resembles some of our native species such as Angelica, Queen Anne's Lace, and cow parsnip. Unlike native species, hogweed can grow up to 5 metres tall and has an herbaceous stem 5 to 10 centimetres in diameter. The stem and leaf stalks are hollow, covered with coarse hairs, and are often purple-spotted. The compound leaf is deeply grooved and can span one metre across. In summer, Hogweed produces a white umbrella-shaped flower from June to July, which will produce large flat oval seeds.

Where is it found?

Although native to Asia, Giant Hogweed has invaded many regions of the world including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. Locally, sightings have been reported in the towns of Collingwood, New Tecumseth, Mono and Wasaga Beach, and the townships of Adjala-Tosorontio, Clearview and Essa. Hogweed 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.



Photo (above): NVCA
Photo (right): Leslie J. Mehrhoff
University of Connecticut, bugwood.org

How does it impact our local environment?

With its broad leaves and dense canopy, giant hogweed often out-competes native species, reducing the variety of species that grow in the surrounding area. Its invasive potential is increased by the vast number of seeds it can produce - up to 50,000 per plant! These seeds can be spread short distances by the wind, be carried by wildlife or human activity, or float downstream in rivers to colonize new areas. Generally they are found within 10 metres of the parent plants. Seeds can remain viable for 7 to 15 years.

Why should I be cautious around it?

Giant hogweed poses a serious health threat - if you come across it or think you have it on your property,



Photo: USDA APHIS PPQ Archive, USDA APHIS PPQ, bugwood.org

DO NOT touch it. Hogweed stalks, leaves, and bristles contain a noxious sap that sensitizes skin to sunlight. Contact between the skin and sap can occur by brushing up against or breaking the plant's bristles, stalks or leaves. Once the sap comes into contact with skin, exposure to sunlight can cause severe burns and painful blistering, usually within 48 hours. Blisters can develop into purple and black scars, leading to years of recurring inflammation and dermatitis (skin irritation), as well as permanent scarring. Contact between the sap and eyes can lead to temporary or permanent blindness.

Giant Hogweed

(*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

Safety tips for working around giant hogweed:

Please follow these safety tips when working with and around giant hogweed:

- Wear full-length clothing and closed-toed shoes, being careful to not leave bare skin exposed.
- Wear gloves, a mask and safety helmet with face shield if undertaking any hogweed control measures.
- Immediately launder clothing that has come into contact with giant hogweed.
- Use soap and water to wash down equipment that has made contact with giant hogweed.

What to do if you've come into contact with giant hogweed:

- Cover up affected areas and keep them out of direct sunlight.
- Wash affected areas immediately with soap and cold water.
- Seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Options for controlling giant hogweed:

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority 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.

- “Weed whackers” and mowers should not be used to control giant hogweed plants because they can spray the phototoxic sap into the air, exposing the operator to potential injury. Mowing will not eradicate giant hogweed effectively and serves only to stimulate budding on the rootstalk. Plants are able to re-sprout and flower again in the same season when mowed.
- Small infestations can be effectively hand-pulled or dug up (using proper safety measures). Isolated plants should be carefully removed in order to stop them from invading larger areas. It is important that the removed plants be double or triple-bagged in garbage bags (clear bags work 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 place bags in the trash before the sun treatment is complete, and do not compost the plants as this will lead to further seed dispersal and infestation.
- Large infestations of giant hogweed can be treated with the herbicide Roundup (available at home and garden retail centres). Under the new Cosmetic Pesticide Ban, landowners are able to use Roundup (a Class 7 pesticide) to control poisonous plants on their own property. An initial application is best applied between March and early June, and again in July or August to kill any remaining plants. To minimize impacts on non-target species, spray only when there is no wind, avoid spraying near water, follow all herbicide directions, and only apply as permitted under the pesticide ban. For more information on pesticide use and restrictions, call the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's Public Information Centre at 1-800-565-4923 or visit www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/land/pesticides/
- Monitor the same location in following years (spring and summer). Seeds in the soil can be viable for 7 to 15 years, so continued vigilance in monitoring the area for newly germinating plants is important.



Photo: NVCA

Who to contact:

Please report all sightings of giant hogweed and other invasive species to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters/Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources by calling the Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711 or visit www.invadingspecies.com

Please report sightings of Giant Hogweed in the Nottawasaga Valley watershed to the NVCA by calling David Featherstone at (705) 424-1479, ext. 242 or emailing at dfeatherstone@nvca.on.ca.