

## WHAT IS GIANT HOGWEED?

Giant Hogweed is a non-native plant that is spreading across North America and has now made its appearance in Ontario. This weed can cause injury to agricultural and horticultural crops, natural habitats and ecosystems, some animals and humans. It is highly aggressive, shading out native plants and changing ecosystems as it spreads. The sap from Giant Hogweed contains photosensitizing compounds that, when combined with sunlight, causes blisters and burns to skin and mucous membranes. Scarring can ensue, and the burn area will remain sensitive to sunlight. The sap can even cause blindness if it gets in your eyes.

## IDENTIFYING GIANT HOGWEED

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Huge, 2.5-4m (8 – 14ft) tall
- Large, compound leaf blades (up to 1m (3ft) across)
- Purple-flecked, hairy stem
- Umbrella-shaped clusters of white flowers (up to 1.5m in diameter)

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a member of the *Umbelliferae* family - which includes such plants as anise, carrots, dill, fennel, and Queen Anne's lace (wild carrot) – and resembles its family except in size.



Man standing beneath a Giant Hogweed plant  
(wearing protective gloves!)



Close-up of a Giant Hogweed flower

Giant Hogweed has several “look–a–likes” such as Cow Parsnip, Purple-stemmed Angelica and Water Hemlock. The similarities are found in the shape of the flower and leaves but the most obvious difference is the size. The “look–a–like” plants will only grow to a maximum of 2.5m (8ft) while the Giant Hogweed is much larger at 2.5m- 4m (8ft – 14ft).

#### WHERE DOES IT GROW?

It is commonly found in moist areas, such as along the banks of streams or roadside ditches. It can also be found in disturbed urban areas (e.g. vacant lots).

#### REMOVAL

If you find Giant Hogweed on town/city property, call your municipality to manage it. If you find it on your private property, it is up to you to have it removed. It is safest to call a professional landscaper or exterminator, however if you decide to remove Giant Hogweed yourself, here are some things you can do to protect yourself:

- Avoid ANY contact with skin - wear water-resistant protective clothing, including gloves, goggles, long sleeves and pants.
- Remove flower heads to prevent seed dispersal.
- Sever the plant roots 8-10 cm (3-4 inches) below soil surface, and remove the full rootstalk.
- Place all plant parts in double-bagged plastic garbage bags and allow them to decompose before throwing in garbage.
- Wash all clothing when finished.

#### TREATMENT

An ounce of prevention is always worth a pound of cure, but if you happen to be exposed to Giant Hogweed sap, this is what you should do:

- Get out of the sun quickly – the sap has photosensitizing compounds that when combined with UV light such as sunlight, cause blisters and burns to skin and mucous membranes.
- Wash affected skin with soap and cool water.
- Contact a health care professional for additional advice/treatment.

Useful links:

<http://www.ontarioweeds.com/weed.php?w=HERMZ#human-health-issues>

<http://www.comap.ca/its/searchform.php?Form=MainSpottingSite&MenuItemID=92>