



Giant hogweed

(*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)



Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org

Description

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a large plant that can grow up to 15-20 ft in height. The leaves are compound, deeply lobed, and can grow up to 5 ft wide. Giant hogweed has a hollow, ridged stem, colored with purple blotches and small, coarse, white hairs. When flowering from June to July, giant hogweed produces white flower heads that form a flat-topped umbrella shape, which can reach a diameter of up to 2.5 ft. The seeds of giant hogweed are dry and oval in shape, with brown oil tubes extending past $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total seed length.

Do not touch or handle this plant! The sap of giant hogweed can cause severe burns within 48 hours when combined with moisture and exposure to UV radiation. Skin sensitivity to the sap typically peaks between 30 minutes and 2 hours after initial contact. If you come into contact with giant hogweed, immediately wash the exposed area with soap and water and keep the area away from sunlight for at least 48 hours after.

Native Range and Original Use

Giant hogweed is native to the Caucasus Mountain region of Eurasia, between the Black and Caspian Seas. It was introduced to Europe and North America as an ornamental garden plant in the early twentieth century.

Habitat and Dispersion

Giant hogweed prefers open habitats with abundant light and moisture but can grow in partial shade as well. It can often be found growing along streams and rivers, roadsides, yards, fields, and forests. An average giant hogweed plant can produce 20,000 seeds, but some have been reported to produce over 100,000 seeds. Seedling mortality is high, but surviving seeds are dispersed short distances by wind, and longer distances by water.



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Best Management Practice

You should not attempt management of giant hogweed on your own, as the sap can cause severe burns. Contact your local PRISM with a clear photograph and location of the plant, and either PRISM or DEC staff will come and control the outbreak for free.

Root cutting, cutting the plant, mowing, plowing, covering plants with soil, and removing the flower heads and seeds are the best ways to manage giant hogweed. All methods need to be continued for multiple years until no new growth occurs from the seed bank.

If you find giant hogweed, please use caution and report on iMap.

Sources: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html>, <https://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=4536>