

Giant hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum

Family Apiaceae



Identification

- Biennial species (plant with a two-year lifecycle) up to 3.5 m tall.
- Stems are hollow, grooved and covered in bristle-like hairs and reddish/purple blotches or spots.
- Many white flowers (December to February) are held in an umbrella-shaped flower head at the top of the stem.
- Large, serrated leaves (up to 50 cm long) are made up of 3 leaflets.
- Produces many long-lived, flattened seeds.



Giant hogweed in flower. Photo: K. McCombs



Giant hogweed stem showing bristle-like hairs and reddish/purple blotches. Photo: A.Paltridge.

Why is it a problem?

Giant hogweed is poisonous. The plant exudes a watery, clear sap, which on direct contact with skin can cause sensitivity to ultra violet radiation. This can result in painful burns and blisters. Even small particles of giant hogweed sap or dust exposed to skin when weed-eating, can irritate skin. The bristles on the stalks and stem also contain a toxic sap. Giant hogweed can also compete with and exclude native vegetation that grows along river or stream edges.

Similar species

Young leaves of *Gunnera tinctoria* and *G. manicata* can easily be mistaken for giant hogweed. To distinguish, each gunnera leaf is comprised of 1 leaf; each giant hogweed leaf is made up of 3 leaflets. *Heracleum sphondylium*, cow parsnip, (sorry, no picture available) which is related to giant hogweed can be distinguished by having green to reddish brown stems that lack the reddish/purple blotches and spots. The sap of this plant is also noted as being poisonous with similar effects to giant hogweed.

Where is it found?

Giant hogweed is found scattered throughout Canterbury. It can be found growing in gardens, waste places and along river/stream sides.

Control

It is extremely important to wear protective clothing when undertaking any control work on giant hogweed to eliminate plant material coming into contact with skin. Plants can be dug out, taking care to remove all the roots. An appropriate herbicide can also be applied. Use all herbicides in accordance with the manufacturers instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other plants, the soil or waterways.



Gunnera leaf. Photo: A.Paltridge.



Giant hogweed leaf. Photo: A.Paltridge.