

Giant Hogweed - RBG Fact sheet



There is interest every summer in Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), an invasive alien plant in Ontario. This fact sheet is a quick overview of information about this species and its issues.

Is This New?

Giant hogweed is on the radar in Hamilton and Burlington right now and will be in the media, but it's not a new issue. Several populations of giant hogweed have been found in at Warren Park and along Spencer Creek in Dundas. Conservation Halton has noted many areas within their watershed where giant hogweed occurs. Over the last decade, RBG has been actively controlling the spread of giant hogweed in our nature sanctuaries. RBG staff recently found one plant along Spencer Creek Trail and there were several plants found within Long Valley Brook last year. There were no plants detected this spring (2010) in Long Valley Brook, but this species is known to exhibit population fluctuations. A coordinated effort between city

councils, conservation authorities and other landowners like RBG is underway to eradicate giant hogweed in our region before it gets out of control.

In general, this plant is spectacularly large, and its sap can cause serious skin irritation. However, its presence in Ontario is neither new nor is it considered a serious invasive species problem.

Giant hogweed is a perennial herb whose seed is easily spread via waterways (it produces a lot of seed and they can spread pretty far). Its ideal growing conditions are along streambanks and floodplains where it quickly out-competes native vegetation. Giant hogweed is also photo-toxic. **The sap causes chemical burns after affected skin is exposed to sunlight.** These two reasons are why we are making every effort to stop the spread of this species and eradicate it now while the populations are still manageable.

Quick Facts - Giant Hogweed and its relative Cow Parsnip

- Giant Hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum* (called the Parsnip Tree in the UK) was introduced to Ontario from Europe or central Asia, probably as an ornamental plant. It's truly a giant - can reach well over 2 m in height: up to 4+ m or more in some cases
- Often in our area, Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*, syn. *Heracleum lanatum*, *Heracleum spondylium*) - aka Indian Celery or Pushki - is mistaken for Giant Hogweed; this is native to Ontario (only North American native member of the genus); still spectacular, Cow Parsnip can reach 1-2 m in height
- Giant Hogweed has been found in BC (lower Vancouver Island and Vancouver area), Southern Ontario (Goderich to Toronto to near Ottawa), the eastern townships of Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and a sighting or two on Newfoundland

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- Giant Hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum* was introduced to Ontario from Europe or central Asia, probably as an ornamental plant. It's truly a giant - can reach well over 2 m in height - to more than 5 m in some cases
- Member of the parsnip/carrot family. Resembles slightly wild carrot
- Often in our area, Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*, syn. *Heracleum lanatum*, *Heracleum spondylium*) - aka Indian Celery or Pushki - is mistaken for Giant Hogweed; this is a native (only native member of the genus); still spectacular, Cow Parsnip can reach 1-2 m in height
- GH has been found in BC (lower Vancouver Island and Vancouver area), Southern Ontario (Goderich to Toronto to near Ottawa), the eastern townships of Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and a sighting or two on Newfoundland
- CP is considered widespread and is often seen in our area
- Both GH and CP are poisonous. They are close relatives, and both can cause severe skin reactions (phytodermatitis). Neither should be touched with bare skin. Recommendations are for rubber gloves, rain suits, goggled, etc. to protect all exposed areas
- Control - large plants can be pulled and bagged; do not burn or compost; take special precautions (see below); small plants can be mowed; mowing to eradicate seed bank can require 7+ years
- Some people actually eat CP; called an "acquired taste" but not recommended because of toxicity
- GH flowers only once in its life

Telling them apart:

- Stems of GH are covered with whisker-like coarse hairs. Stems of CP are smooth.
- Flowers of GH are white; flowers of CP are yellow
- Leaves of GH are deeply incised; leaves of CP are rounder,

More information:

- On-line weed identification service at: www.weedinfo.ca
- Lots of material on-line at: Ontarioweeds.com
- Giant Hogweed best practice eradication guide from EU and Denmark at: <http://www.giant-alien.dk/>

Recommendations from Waterloo Region Record article ("Hogweed growing into giant nuisance") of 29 June 2009:

- Avoid the clear sap, which causes skin to become sensitive to sunlight, causing nasty chemical burns
- If exposed to the sap, avoid sunlight, don't touch your eyes and wash thoroughly with soap and water
- Get medical help if blisters form
- Contact with eyes can cause temporary or permanent blindness
- Sap can also produce painless red blotches that later develop into purplish or brownish scars that may persist for years
- Seeds can lie dormant up to seven years, so expect years of work to eradicate the plants from an area
- Wear eye protection, gloves and rubberized overalls if you try to cut it or spray herbicides; calling a contractor is safer
- Don't use power tools to cut it or burn the plants; sap will spread in the air
- Give hogweed a wide berth and report it to your township or city hall if you find it.

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Garden alternate/replacement

- *Telekia speciosa* - Giant Ox-Eye daisy - big leaves, in flower 2 m max
- *Anthriscus* cultivar Ravens' wing - ornamental Chervil
- *Myrris odorata* - sweet cicely

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