

Identification and Control of Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, is a large, showy plant native to the Caucasus region of Asia. It was a popular specimen plant during Victorian times because of its impressive height and flower size. It, however, has become an invasive, difficult to eradicate weed over time. Giant Hogweed prefers a rich, damp soil and is frequently found growing along stream banks, in roadside ditches and in moist waste areas in New York State.

Identification

Giant Hogweed can attain a height of 6 to 14 feet and is probably the tallest herbaceous plant found in New York State. Its thick, coarse stems range from 2 to 4 inches in diameter and its compound leaves reach a span of 5 feet. It has wide, flat-topped clusters of small white flowers that measure up to 2 ½ feet across. The flowers resemble huge umbels of Queen Anne's Lace. The stalks are blotched with deep purple and the flower stems are ribbed. Each leaflet of the huge compound leaf has many incisions. This monster plant is hairy all over, but the hairs at the base of the leaf stalk are particularly prominent.

Giant Hogweed is a member of the carrot and parsley family that flowers from mid-June to mid-July. After flowering, green fruits appear that quickly turn brown and dry. They are then dispersed by wind or carried away by running water. During the winter months hogweed takes on a skeleton-like appearance with the now dead flower heads attached to the huge stalks.

Giant Hogweed is often mistaken for two native plants that grow in the upstate New York area. They are cow parsnip, *Heracleum lanatum*, and purple-stemmed angelica (*Angelica atropurpurea*).

Cow parsnip is usually found in wooded areas and reaches a maximum height of only 6 feet. Its flower clusters are similar to

hogweed in that they are flat-topped, however, are less than a foot across. The leaflets on the compound leaf are also smaller and less incised. The stem of cow parsnip is also smaller and has little purple color. Though hairy, the hairs on cow parsnip are finer and give the plant a fuzzy rather than a coarse appearance.

Angelica has uniformly purple, hairless stems and round flower clusters that are less than 1 foot in diameter. Angelica is shorter than hogweed, rarely approaching 8 feet in height.

Potential Health Threat

Giant Hogweed is a potential health threat in that the sap can cause painful, burning blisters in some people. These blisters can later scar. The skin irritation appears several days after exposure to the plant juices. If accidental exposure to the plant sap occurs, wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water as soon as possible.

Control

Wear disposable rubber gloves and long sleeves when working with hogweed. The chemical glyphosate (Roundup) is effective in controlling hogweed. It should be applied when the plant is actively growing during the summer months, when the plant is at or beyond bud stage. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide and will kill any surrounding vegetation that it comes into contact with. Exercise caution if desirable vegetation is nearby.

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