



Giant Hogweed



GIANT HOGWEED - Don't Touch!

This toxic weed is hard to miss. Originally introduced from Asia as an ornamental garden plant, Giant Hogweed subsequently escaped from cultivation and is now on the Invasive Plant Council of BC's "most unwanted" list¹. The plant is significant, bold, striking, enormous – and dangerous. Unlike most plants we have written about in our series on toxic weeds, this one is unlikely to be a concern for commercial plantings of annual vegetables or silage corn, or even perennial stands of small fruit or forage grass. Giant Hogweed is more likely to be found in uncultivated areas, disturbed ground, ditches, riparian areas and moist pastures. The danger exists because the sap of the plant contains phytotoxins that cause severe and painful burns upon contact with skin in the presence of sunlight. The scars from resulting welts, rashes and blisters can be so bad that they may persist for several years. If sap gets into contact with eyes it could cause blindness. Handling of the plant or its parts is therefore extremely hazardous. It can be found in the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, Gulf Islands and lower Vancouver Island².

A member of the parsley or carrot family, Giant Hogweed, or *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, is primarily known for its distinct size, growing up to 5 metres in height. White flowers are in dome or umbrella-shaped clusters (this formation of flowers is called an 'umbel') that may be over a metre in diameter. Plants may not flower for a few years, then bloom in summer after which the plant dies off. Leaves may grow to over a metre across, are shiny, deeply divided like a maple leaf with very saw-toothed edges. The stems are hollow with dark red or purple blotches, and contain bristly hairs^{3,4}. Giant Hogweed is similar in some ways to a related plant; Cow Parsnip. A comparison chart can be found below.

Comparison: Giant Hogweed vs Cow Parsnip

	Plant Height	Leaves	Surface Hairs	Flower Heads
Giant Hogweed	Up to 5 metres	Shiny, over a metre across, deeply divided	Stiff, bristly hairs	Over a metre across
Cow Parsnip	Up to 2 metres	Not shiny, smaller, in 3 lobes	Soft hairs	No more than 20 cm across

If you believe you have Giant Hogweed on your property please contact the Invasive Plant Council of BC at 1-888-WEEDSBC or www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca.

References:

- <http://www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca/invasive-plants/invasive-plant-watch>
- Giant Hogweed: National Fact Sheet. Compiled by the National Invasive Species Working Group.
- http://www.anpc.ab.ca/wiki/index.php/Heracleum_mantegazzianum