



## INVASIVE SPECIES

### Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)



Giant Hogweed is an invasive perennial known for its enormous size. This species usually grows from 2.5 to 4 metres (8 to 14 feet) high with leaves up to 1 metre (3 feet) in breadth. It has a thick, 5 to 10 centimetres (2 to 4 inches) hollow stem. Its stem and the undersides of its leaves are covered in coarse hairs. Its large, umbrella-shaped flowers are white in colour and can be more than 30 centimetres (1 foot) in diameter. The seeds of Giant Hogweed are flattened and oval in shape. This plant produces a clear, toxic watery sap that causes a skin reaction known as photosensitivity.



It is important to avoid skin contact with Giant Hogweed as it can make your skin more sensitive to sun

#### Concern

Giant Hogweed has two major negative impacts. Firstly, due to its invasive nature, it poses a threat to native biodiversity. Secondly, Giant Hogweed is a public health hazard. It produces a noxious sap that sensitizes the skin to ultraviolet light. This is known as photosensitivity, which can result in severe and painful burning and blistering. It is important to avoid any skin contact with this plant.

#### Distribution

Giant Hogweed is native to Asia but has been introduced to both Europe and North America where it can be found along roadsides, vacant lots, streams, and rivers. It is often classified as a freshwater weed and usually found in floodplains. Giant Hogweed prefers, but is not limited to, moist soils. In Halton Region, Giant Hogweed is most widely distributed along Sixteen Mile Creek.

## Propagation

Reproduction of Giant Hogweed is achieved both by seed propagation and vegetatively from buds formed on the crown and rootstalk. It takes several years for a Giant Hogweed plant to produce its first flowering stalk. Although Giant Hogweed is a perennial, it is believed to die after its first flowering and seed set. Despite this, plants may produce additional crowns that continue to flower and seed set. Seed viability is greater than seven years. Giant Hogweed is easily spread through seed dispersal as seeds can float down waterways for considerable distances and start new plants at new locations. Giant Hogweed may be spread by consumption of its fruits by birds that deposit viable seeds long distances from the original plant.

## Control

When removing Giant Hogweed it is very important to wear proper clothing (long sleeves, high shoes, gloves, face and eye protection) so as to avoid skin contact with the plant. If skin contact does occur, the area should be washed immediately in cool, soapy, running water. Since the sap increases the photosensitivity of the skin, it is important to avoid exposure to the sun for at least 48 hours after contact. If you do come into contact with the sap of Giant Hogweed, contact a medical professional as soon as possible for advice and treatment. When disposing of Giant Hogweed, all parts of the plant should be placed in secure black plastic bag and left in the sun for three to four weeks. This helps to destroy any seeds and roots. These bags should then be sent to the landfill.

The best control of Giant Hogweed is to not plant it! Other possible control methods include: manual removal and chemical treatment. Plants can be manually dug out but it is important to remove the full rootstalk to reduce the risk of it spreading further. Removing the seed heads can help control it but this must be done every year to have a positive effect. Mowing Giant Hogweed is not an effective control method

since mowing tends to stimulate budding on the rootstalk and risks exposure to the toxic sap. Herbicides can also be effective in controlling the spread of Giant Hogweed but it is important to use pesticides only in a cautious and responsible manner.

## Look-alikes that are safe

Halton Region is home to a number of native plants that resemble Giant Hogweed but do not pose the same health risk. When in doubt, always confirm plant identification with an expert. The following is a list of native “look-alikes:”

Cow Parsnip

(*Heracleum lanatum* *Heracleum maximum*)

Purple-Stemmed Angelica

(*Angelica atropurpurea*)

Spotted Waterhemlock

(*Cicuta maculata*)

Poison Hemlock

(*Conium maculatum*)

Wild Parsnip

(*Pastinaca sativa*)



Poison Hemlock shown here

The University of Pennsylvania has published an informative pamphlet outlining the characteristics of Giant Hogweed and a number of its “look-alike” plants. This pamphlet can be found at:  
<http://weeds.cas.psu.edu/hogweed.pdf>

## Conservation Halton Natural Champion for a Healthy Watershed



Conservation Halton is the community based environmental agency that protects, restores and manages the natural resources in its watershed. Conservation Halton has staff that includes ecologists, land use planners, engineers, foresters and educators, along with a network of volunteers, who are guided by a Board of Directors that includes municipally elected and appointed citizens. Conservation Halton is recognized for its stewardship of creeks, forests and Niagara Escarpment lands through science based programs and services.

For more information on Giant Hogweed and other Invasive Species contact Conservation Halton:

[www.conservationhalton.on.ca](http://www.conservationhalton.on.ca)

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