

Giant Hogweed

What is Giant Hogweed?

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is an invasive plant species that can cause health issues in humans, and is dangerous to the plant ecosystem. It is native to the Caucasus region of Eurasia and was likely introduced to North America as an ornamental garden plant. It is usually found along road beds, streambeds and forest edges. It has been sighted around Toronto waterways.

Giant Hogweed can reach a height of approximately 4.5 metres (15 feet). It has hollow stems with dark reddish-purple splotches and coarse white hair. The leaves can grow up to 1.5 metres (5 feet) wide and have hairs on the underside. The plant also produces flattened oval shaped fruit and in the summer, small white flowers form. Giant Hogweed looks like cow parsnip, Queen Anne's Lace (wild carrot) and Angelica, but is much larger.



What will happen if I touch the plant?

Giant Hogweed has a clear watery sap on the stem and leaves that burns the skin in the presence of sunlight. The initial burning red rash goes on to form blisters; the skin may then shed and resemble a burn. This reaction can begin within hours of touching the sap but may be as late as up to two days after contact. The affected area of the skin may be darker than before after healing. This darkness can last for months. As well, contact between the sap and eyes could damage the eyes. In most cases the rash will heal on its own, but severe cases will require medical treatment.

What should I do if I come in contact with Giant Hogweed?

- Avoid touching your eyes or wiping the sap on other parts of your body or clothes.
- Wash affected areas immediately.
- Keep the affected area out of the sun.
- Seek medical advice.

What do I do if I find Giant Hogweed on my property?

It is strongly recommended that you contact a professional to remove it for you. If you choose to remove it yourself:

- wear protective clothing, including gloves, long sleeves, pants, and eye protection, rain coat and boots;
- avoid getting sap on your skin;
- immediately remove any flower heads to prevent seed growth and dispersal;
- sever the plant roots 8 - 12 cm below the soil surface;
- dispose of all plant parts in double-bagged sealed garbage bags. Identify the bag as containing Hogweed to qualify for free collection (bags of extra regular garbage must still feature a City-issued bag tag to receive collection). Set labelled bags of Hogweed out on your regular scheduled garbage collection day. Do not dispose of the plant or plant parts in your backyard composter or in either of the City's Green Bin or Yard Waste Programs.
- Do not dispose of plant material in ravine or natural area.
- after completing the plant removal, wash the clothes that were worn when removing the plant to prevent possible transfer of toxins
- return to plant site periodically to remove any new plant growth;
- speak with a retailer about products permitted for control of giant hogweed.

What do I do if I find Giant Hogweed in a park or ravine?

If you suspect you have found Giant Hogweed, do not touch the plant and dial 311.

Please stay clear of Giant Hogweed in locations where it has been identified with warning signage. Use park pathways and maintained areas, keep your dogs on leash, stay on trails and avoid walking through naturalized areas.

My pet ran through a patch of Giant Hogweed, what do I do?

If it is possible that your pet has had contact with the sap from Giant Hogweed, it is important not to touch your pet with bare hands. The sap will likely not affect your pet, but there is potential that you could get the sap transferred to your skin via your pet's fur.

Using protective gloves, immediately wash your pet with soap and water and seek medical attention if you feel you have been exposed. Seek the advice of a veterinarian if you have concerns about your pet.

What should I do if my neighbour has Giant Hogweed on their property?

Your neighbour may not be aware of the health concerns associated with giant hogweed. Share this information with your neighbour or suggest that your neighbour call 311 for more information.