

# Pest Alert



## Rhode Island Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is an invasive and poisonous plant infesting the North East and other parts of the US. The plants pose a threat as both an environmental and a public health hazard. Surveys are underway to determine the distribution of, and control methods for, the plant in Rhode Island.

### Public Health Hazards

Giant Hogweed has a clear, watery sap that increases the photosensitivity of skin, causing a hypersensitivity to sunlight. Skin exposed to sunlight after contact with the sap can cause:

- Second-degree burns, itchiness and swelling.
- Blistering that persists for days to months.
- Purple, brown or black pigmentation of the skin at contact points, which can last for a year or more.
- Recurring skin problems such as dermatitis.
- Scarring.

The sap can also cause temporary or permanent blindness if it comes in contact with the eye. Children have been exposed when using the hollow stems of Giant Hogweed for telescopes or peashooters.

**If you have been exposed to Giant Hogweed Sap:**

**IMMEDIATELY wash the affected areas with soap and water, shield exposed skin from the sun and treat as a surface burn.**

### Environmental Hazards

Giant Hogweed is highly competitive and invasive due to biological factors that give it an edge over native plant species:

- Early season growth provides a “head start” over other species
- High tolerance to shade and flooding
- Tall stems allow for more efficient distribution of seeds
- Seeds can remain viable for several years and can be spread by birds, small mammals, wind or by floating on water
- Able to grow in many habitats

Non-native plants can cause a significant decline in biological diversity and reduce the quality of important habitats. Stands of Giant Hogweed, which can reach up to 1 acre, also contribute to problems with erosion in the winter. Because it grows so well in wetlands, it is also considered an invasive freshwater weed.

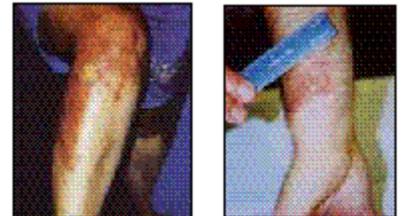


photo courtesy of Donna Ellis, UConn

### Burns caused by Giant Hogweed



photo courtesy USDA APHIS, Oxford, NC



photos courtesy of PA Dept. of Agriculture



above photos courtesy USDA APHIS, Oxford, NC

## Identifying Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed is a biennial or perennial herbaceous plant and can grow up to 15 feet in height. Flowers will form during or after the second year of growth; after flowering the plant dies or can continue flowering for several years. Seeds are in 3/8-inch elliptic dry fruit and can be distinguished by the swollen brown resin canals. Seeds can float on water for up to three days. The roots of this plant are tuberous and large, and root fragments are capable of re-sprouting. Seedlings form a vegetative rosette but are not easily distinguishable from other small plants. Mowing over seedlings only causes stronger resprouts to occur.



### Stems

- 2-4 inches in diameter
- Purple splotches
- Has ridges
- Hollow
- Coarse Hairs



### Leaves

- 3-5 feet wide
- Compound with 3 leaflets
- Stubby, dense hairs on underside and at base of leaf stalks
- Deeply incised



### Flowers

- Individual flowers small, with 5 petals
- Flowers grouped in large flat-topped umbel shaped inflorescences
- Inflorescences can grow to 2.5 feet wide



### Habitats That Support Giant Hogweed

Roadsides	Barnyards
Ravines	Wastelands
Rivers	Railway Lines
Streams	Orchards
Vacant Lots	Gardens

### States With Infestations or Reports of Giant Hogweed

New York	Maine	Vermont
Pennsylvania	Washington DC	Michigan
New Hampshire	Massachusetts	Oregon
Washington	Connecticut	



**If you find Giant Hogweed in Rhode Island: DO NOT attempt to remove the plant yourself. Contact:**  
**Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management**  
**Division of Agriculture and Resource Marketing**  
**Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Program**  
**Phone: 401-949-1770; Fax: 401-949-0344**



**Please note the specific location of the plant(s) and provide details concerning size and number of plant(s).**

*Photo courtesies on this page: Seeds (USDA APHIS); Seedlings (PA Dept. of Agriculture); Stem (top-OR Dept. of Agriculture; bottom-Terry English); Leaves (top-Donna Ellis, UConn; bottom-Christchurch City Council); Flowers (top-Terry English; bottom- Malcolm Storey, bioimages.org.uk, 2001). Layout by J.A. Macfarlan and Holly Frank, 2003.*

#### Information Sources:

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 Washington Department of Natural Resources and Parks, 2002. Best Management Practices: Giant Hogweed. [dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/Weeds/bmp.htm](http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/Weeds/bmp.htm)