

PEST ALERT

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Gus R. Douglass, Commissioner

Giant Hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum Sommier & Levier



Giant hogweed stems and leaf nodes with penny and knife for scale (R. Westbrook).



Giant hogweed leaf (WVDA CAPS; D. Dick).



Underside of giant hogweed flower head (D.R. Ellis).



Giant hogweed plants (USDA APHIS; R. Norris).



Giant hogweed growing near a shed (Anonymous).

Giant hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum* Sommier & Levier (Apiaceae; carrot or parsley family), is native to western Asia and was introduced to Europe and North America as a prized ornamental plant early in the 20th century. This plant produces a chemical in its sap that can cause painful blisters and/or blackened scars on susceptible people when exposed to sunlight. Sap should be removed from skin by immediately washing the exposed area with soap and water.

Description

Giant hogweed stems are 8 to 15 feet tall or possibly taller, 2 to 4 inches in diameter, hollow, grooved, blotched with purple, and covered with coarse white hairs. Its leaves are compound with 3 leaflets, up to 5 feet wide, deeply incised (toothed), and the underside is covered with stiff, stubby hairs. Its flower heads are umbrella shaped, flat topped, up to 2½ feet across, and have numerous small white flowers. Giant hogweed fruits are dry, flattened, $\frac{3}{8}$ inch long, oval, and have dark stripes on the larger surface.

Life History

Giant hogweed is a biennial herb. Seeds germinate from early spring throughout the growing season. Rosettes will form annually for 2 to 4 years before the plants bolt and flower in mid summer. Seeds are produced in late summer and the plants die. Dead stems persist throughout the winter. Seeds can survive for at least 7 years.

Ecology/Habitat

Giant hogweed prefers rich, damp soils and is typically found growing along stream banks, roadside ditches, and in moist waste areas. It is also found around residential areas where it may have been grown as an ornamental. Cattle and pigs are cited as eating giant hogweed with no ill effects and may provide an option for biological control.

Similar Plants

Giant hogweed closely resembles cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum* Bartr.) and purple angelica (*Angelica atropurpurea* L.), both of which are native and common, especially along the Ohio River. However, giant hogweed is usually twice the size of either purple angelica or cow parsnip. Purple angelica has 5 to 7 leaflets per leaf whereas giant hogweed and cow parsnip each have 3 leaflets per leaf. Cow parsnip stems also have little purple and appear fuzzy where giant hogweed stems appear coarse and rough.

For more information or to report suspected infestations, contact:

WV Department of Agriculture
Plant Industries
1900 Kanawha Blvd., E.
Charleston, WV 25305-0191
(304)-558-2212