

Ref: 33-2018 Giant Hogweed

What is Giant Hogweed?

Introduced as an ornamental plant 150 years ago, Giant Hogweed is now widespread throughout the UK and beyond. It is a perennial plant that flowers only in its 4th year of growth and, having flowered, it dies.

Throughout its life each plant can grow to over 5m tall and its flowers can disperse as many as 50,000 seeds allowing the species to spread rapidly and widely. These seeds can remain viable on or in the ground for up to 15 years.

It thrives in any habitat but particularly where soil has been disturbed such as riverbanks, derelict land, or railway embankments.

Identification

- Giant Hogweed grows up to 5m tall
- The stem starts growing in March/April and is green but develops dark red/ purple spots or blotches during summer. It is hollow, furrowed or ribbed, has sparse spiky hairs and can be 100mm across.
- Leaves are dark green, have deeply cut lobes with ragged edges, can be 1 metre across and form in a rosette
- Flowers are white, umbrella like, and up to 500mm across and appear from June in the 4th year
- Seedpods, which are beige, are produced from August to October.

Associated Hazards

- **Health hazard:** The plant contains large amounts of poisonous sap, which on contact with the skin and in the presence of sunlight, causes severe irritation, swelling, and painful watery blisters. This reaction can occur up to 24 hours after exposure to sunlight. Contact with the eyes can cause temporary blindness.
- **Avoid environmental harm:** As it spreads it endangers the survival of native plants. The loss of other vegetation may lead to excessive erosion of soil as the giant hogweed dies back during winter. Giant Hogweed can also cause significant harm to grazing animals.

- **Avoid prosecution:** It is illegal “to plant or otherwise encourage” the growth of Giant Hogweed. This could include moving surrounding soil which may contain either seeds or plant material unless as part of an eradication process.



Action

DO

- ✓ IMMEDIATELY stop all work near to the suspect plant and contact your line manager for instructions if you think that you have identified Giant Hogweed on your site.
- ✓ Seek medical advice if you have been in contact with the sap.
- ✓ Wear protective clothing before touching the plant.

DO NOT

- ✗ DON'T handle the plant without further advice.
- ✗ NEVER stockpile polluted material within 10 metres of a watercourse.
- ✗ DON'T move soil that may contain seeds without specific instruction.
- ✗ NEVER use tracked machinery until areas polluted with Giant Hogweed have been cleared and/or identified and cordoned off. Any vehicles and machinery used within the contaminated area should be thoroughly cleaned within a designated cleaning area.
- ✗ NEVER use a strimmer or chipper on Giant Hogweed material as this can cause sap to become airborne, causing injury.

How is the item to be cascaded and implemented?

Toolbox talk Team briefing SHEQ notice board Process change Supply chain
SHE induction Other