Giant Hogweed

(Heracleum mantegazzianum)

KLEERKUT
invasive weed specialist

This is a tall plant each plant comprises one main stem, green/mottled purple, which can reach over 3 metres in height with large jagged green leaves mostly in the lower half, these can be over 1 metre width. The plant flower can be up to 0.5 metres wide and is formed by flat-topped clusters of tiny white flowers that are held in umbels. Giant Hogweed spreads by seeds, each plant can produce between 5,000 and 100,000 seeds which will disperse being carried by wind, water, animal and other traffic.

Giant Hogweed is principally biennial, meaning that it will flower in year 2. When seeds germinate, they mature during the summer before dying back slightly in the autumn. These florets then display rapid growth the following spring before flowering early/mid-summer – usually June/early July. Seeds then mature before the plant starts to die. By the end of the summer the plant will be nearly dead and the seeds ready to disperse over the autumn and early winter months. Seeds can remain viable for up to 5 years.

Giant Hogweed is an injurious plant causing serious burns to the skin and eyes. The danger is caused by the presence of toxins, which are found in the plant sap which is often transferred by the fine hairs on the stalks and leaves. These toxins are known as furanocoumarins and, once activated by daylight/sunlight, these affect the DNA in the skin causing it to die resulting in severe skin damage blistering, scarring and long term dermatitis. Medically this ultra-sensitivity to daylight is often labelled as phytophotodermatitis, which is derived from the ancient Greek words for plant, light, skin and inflammation.

Typical growth phases of species

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Seed Dispersal			Seed Germination			Year 1 Growth				Dormant	
Dormant			Year 2 Growth		Flowering		Seed Production			Seed Dispersal	

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Main Problems

Over recent years there has been more and more publicity regarding the injurious nature of Giant Hogweed. While regulatory bodies have the power to enforce 'clean up' orders it is likely that the increased risk of personal injury claims and the bad publicity which goes with it will possibly be more effective encouragement for landowners, managers and developers to tackle this problem in a responsible manner.

This species typically demonstrates a rapid rate of spread within suitable environments, often building sites when soils are disturbed. Soils containing viable seeds are classified as controlled waste under the current Waste Management Regulations Act 1994.

The dense coverage damages the environment by reducing biodiversity (flora and fauna) by shading out.

Giant Hogweed Images

Similar Species

Common hogweed

Cowparsley

Gunnera

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