

Giant hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum

Invasive: High impact

Species profile

- Habitat:** Terrestrial. Most common on river banks.
- Distribution in Ireland:** Widespread and common in Northern Ireland, locally abundant in the rest of Ireland.
- Status:** Established.
- Family name:** Apiaceae (Umbelliferae).
- Reproduction:** By seed that can remain viable up to 15 years after initial dispersal. Seeds spread by wind, water, animal and human influence.

Identifying features

- Height:** The size of giant hogweed makes it easy to identify, as it can grow up to 5-6m in height.
- Stem:** The main stem is large, usually with purple blotches, hollow and can have hairy bristles and be 5-10cm in diameter.
- Flowers:** White or rarely pink, flowering from June to August. There can be up to 50,000 (1.5 cm) seeds per plant.
- Leaves:** Serrated and sharply divided leaves; can grow to 3m in length and 1.5m wide.



Deeply serrated and large leaves

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Hairy bristles on stem

© GBNNSS



Stem can be 5-10cm in diameter

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Giant hogweed Stem can be 5-10cm in diameter

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Threats

Giant hogweed poses a threat to human health due to production of a hazardous sap that can cause severe burns and scarring by sensitising the skin to light (UV radiation).

Its large surface area means it shades out native species and its high volume of seed production means it easily propagates.

The species can also increase soil erosion along river banks.

Seasonal change

- Spring:** Expanded leaves and the plant is over 15cm in height.
- Summer:** Large flowering head can be seen.
- Autumn:** Green areas of the stem lose their colour and turn yellowish-brown. Flowers are replaced by seeds.
- Winter:** Dies back in winter leaving river banks vulnerable to erosion.

Similar species

- Hogweed (*Heracelum sphondylium*).
- Other large plants in the Apiaceae family.



Spraying of giant hogweed
© Tom Richards Wye & Usk Foundation



Giant hogweed © RPS Group PLC

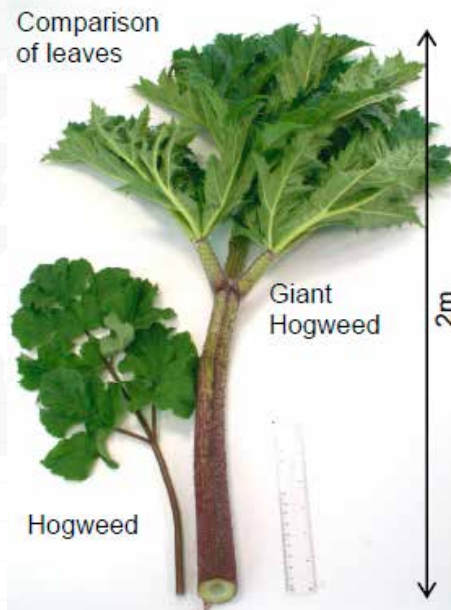


Hogweed, which is a native plant
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Cross section comparison of a hogweed (left) and giant hogweed (right)

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Comparison of hogweed (left) and giant hogweed (right)

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