



FACT SHEET

GIANT HOGWEED

(*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

- Giant hogweed can grow 15 to 20 feet tall.
- The stem and leaf stalks are hollow and hairy with reddish-purple blotches. The stem contains a clear watery sap.
- The leaves are deeply cut and can be up to five feet wide.
- Giant hogweed flowers from mid-May to July, with numerous white flowers clustered in a flat, umbrella-shaped head that is up to 2-1/2 feet in diameter.
- The fruits are flattened, 3/8 inch long. They split into two winged parts with one seed in each.
- Carrot family



LOOK ALIKES: (both native—not weeds)



Cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) is smaller, usually growing to only three to five feet, with flower heads less than one foot in width. The leaves are hairy on the underside and are not so deeply incised.

Coltsfoot (*Petasites palmatus*) blooms in early spring and is **much** smaller than giant hogweed. It has rounded leaves and smaller, more rounded flower heads.



WHY BE CONCERNED?

- Giant hogweed is hazardous to humans because skin contact with the sap followed by exposure to sunlight can cause painful burns and permanent scars.
- It crowds out desirable native plants that supply food and habitat for wildlife.
- Giant hogweed damages riparian areas when it dies back in the fall, leaving banks unvegetated and susceptible to erosion.

Giant hogweed is a Class A Noxious Weed. Eradication of this plant is required in Jefferson County.

DISTRIBUTION:

Giant hogweed has been found in several sites in Port Townsend, on Highway 101 and at Discovery Bay. Most are now eliminated.

ECOLOGY:

- Giant hogweed prefers rich, damp soil, but can spread along stream and roadsides.
- Most plants die after they flower and produce seed, which can take four years or more. Individual plants may produce additional crowns which continue to flower and set seed.
- It spreads rapidly, mainly by seed. One flower head can produce thousands of seeds which are distributed by wind, water, animals or people.
- Giant hogweed can develop a massive root system that persists and is difficult to remove.

CONTROL

Prevention and early detection are the best means of control.

- **Do not buy** or plant giant hogweed.
- **Avoid** introducing soil or gravel from areas known to have giant hogweed.
- **Remove** seedlings when young because they can usually be pulled easily.
- **Replant** the area with a desirable (preferably native) plant species, to discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly, bag or burn seed heads.
- **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

HANDPULLING can control small infestations, but the entire root must be dug out or the plant may grow back; care should be taken to avoid skin contact with the sap.

REPEATED MOWING during the growing season will weaken the plant and prevent it from producing seed, but the roots remain alive for many years when plants are kept from flowering. Known sites should be monitored and mowed as long as plants continue to appear. Avoid skin contact with the sap that may ooze from mown fragments.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL: Cattle and pigs will eat the plant without ill-effect. Trampling while grazing also discourages growth.

HERBICIDES can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying a herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount. For perennial weeds, long term control requires stopping seed production **and** attacking the weed's root system. Translocated herbicides, (ones that move throughout a plant's system) are recommended. These are most effective on young, actively growing plants because the herbicide moves around the plant more quickly. Also, herbicide is more easily absorbed by clean, new leaves.

- **Note:** Most herbicides will **NOT** prevent germination of weed seeds already in the soil, so monitoring and retreatment are necessary.

Call the Weed Board for specific herbicide advice

Call if you see this plant!



Giant hogweed leaves

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