



Giant Hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum

“Long ago in the Russian hills, A Victorian explorer found the regal Hogweed by a marsh, He captured it and brought it home. Waste no time! They are approaching. Hurry now, we must protect ourselves and find some shelter, Strike by night! They are defenceless. They all need the sun to photosensitize their venom. Soon they escaped, spreading their seed, Preparing for an onslaught, threatening the human race. Mighty Hogweed is avenged. Human bodies soon will know our anger. Kill them with your Hogweed hairs. HERACLEUM MANTEGAZZIANI” - excerpted from The Return of Giant Hogweed by Genesis.

What is it?

Though in the same family as carrots, parsley, dill and cilantro, giant hogweed is not something you'll want to add to your salad or sprinkle onto your burrito. A fully grown giant hogweed, often described as Queen Anne's lace on steroids, has leaves that can extend 5-feet wide, thick stalks topped with feathery umbrella-like flowers - and can grow to an impressive 15 feet tall. But its size isn't what it's most notorious for. The sap of giant hogweed causes *phytophotodermatitis* in humans due to the *furocoumarin* (a class of often toxic defensive organic chemical compounds produced by some plants) derivatives in the leaves, roots, stems, flowers, and seeds of the plant. When these chemicals come into contact with human skin they cause a reaction that leads to severe blistering if exposed to sunlight. Contact with the eyes can lead to temporary or even permanent blindness, and if inhaled the sap can cause respiratory problems. In short - don't mess with this plant.

Native to the Caucasus region of Russia and Central Asia, it was introduced to Europe and North America as a popular curiosity in ornamental gardens of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Why is it important?

Besides the public health concerns, giant hogweed can also be invasive under certain conditions. It does especially well in disturbed soils and along waterways where its seeds can spread long distances. The plant is on the **Federal Noxious Weeds List**, meaning it is illegal to sell or transport across state lines. Large colonies can form from a single plant due to a combination of high seed abundance and shoots popping up from the roots giving rise to dozens of offspring. Once established, it takes up to 5 years to completely eradicate a colony because of regrowth from seeds and roots.

How does NETN monitor it?

Giant hogweed is on the [Target Invasive Species](#) lists for most NETN parks. The goal of the [Early Detection of Invasive Species Program](#) is to help NPS employees, contractors, and citizen scientists to detect invasive species while they are in the early stages of establishment and still relatively easy

and economical to eradicate. To help do this, a short list of target insect pest and exotic plant species specific to each park has been developed. The lists include species that are either present in the park at low levels and of management concern if spreading is detected, or not present, but have demonstrated impacts to ecosystem function in the region.

How can you get rid of it?

The wrong way to try to eradicate hogweed if you find it on your property would be to mow or weed-whack it down. Doing so would cause the toxic sap to be sprayed everywhere and the plants would just root-sprout again anyway. Either the roots have to be dug up or the plants have to be sprayed with an herbicide. Contacting local authorities or hiring a professional who can properly destroy the plant and its seeds is sometimes the best course of action, but if going it alone, take heed of the following advice. Flower heads have to be carefully cut, bagged and discarded in the trash. Make sure to wear gloves, long sleeves, pants, shoes and eye protection when controlling hogweed. If you get hogweed sap on your skin, wash it immediately and try to keep the exposed area out of the sun for at least couple of days.

For more information

Find protocols, field guides, reports, and resource briefs on the Early Detection of Invasive Species webpage (<http://go.nps.gov/invasives>).



USDA photo

