

Giant Hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum

An attractive but dangerous noxious weed-
Have you seen this plant?



About Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed is a member of the carrot or parsley family (Apiaceae) that was introduced into Europe and North America in the early 1900s. It is native to the Caucasus region of Eurasia. Its massive size and imposing appearance made it desirable for arboretums and gardens. Giant Hogweed soon escaped from cultivation and became established in rich, moist soils along roadside ditches, stream banks, waste ground, along tree lines and open wooded areas. In the U.S. it is known to occur in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. The plant's name comes from Hercules, of ancient mythological fame, and Giant Hogweed is aptly described as robust in appearance.

Hogweed is Hazardous

This tall majestic plant is a public health hazard because of its potential to cause severe skin irritation in susceptible people. Plant sap produces painful, burning blisters within 24 to 48 hours after contact. Plant juices also can produce painless red blotches that later develop into purplish or brownish scars that may persist for several years. For an adverse reaction to occur, the skin, contaminated with plant juices, must be moist (perspiration) and then exposed to sunlight. Some other plants are capable of causing this reaction, known as phytophotodermatitis (Phyto=plant, Photo=light), including several that are also in the Giant Hogweed family.



Giant Hogweed is a Federal Noxious Weed, making it unlawful to propagate, sell or transport this plant in Michigan. The USDA has been surveying for this weed since 1998.



Giant Hogweed in late summer: Seeds are forming.



A Herculean stem!

Giant Hogweed Plant

Giant Hogweed is a biennial or perennial herb growing from a forked or branched taproot. Plants sprout in early spring from the roots or from seeds.

How to Recognize Giant Hogweed

The best time to identify Giant Hogweed is when it's blooming

- **Flowers:** numerous small white flowers in June or July, clustered into a flat-topped umbel up to 2½ ft. across.
- **Stems** are hollow, ridged, 2-4 in. in diameter, 8-14 ft. tall, with purple blotches and coarse white hairs. The hairs are especially prominent that circle the stem at the base of the leaf stalks.
- **Leaves** are lobed, deeply incised and up to 5 ft. across.
- **Fruit** (containing the seed) is dry, flattened, oval, about 3/8 in. long and tan with brown lines.

Known Distribution in Michigan

as of January 1, 2005

Branch County
 Calhoun County
 Gogebic County
 Ingham County
 Jackson County
 Kalamazoo County
 Kent County
 Manistee County
 Oakland County
 Ottawa County
 Saginaw County



Beginning to flower



huge leaves



coarse hairs circling the stem



large clusters of small flowers

Growth Stages



Dead Stems

After producing seeds in late summer, the plants die, leaving stems standing into winter. At this point seeds have been dispersed to germinate the following spring or in future years.

(Photo credit: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Misc. Bull. 123)



Seedling

Seeds germinate from early spring throughout the growing season.



Flowering Stems

Plants bolt and flower in early to mid-summer after rosette plants accumulate enough energy reserves

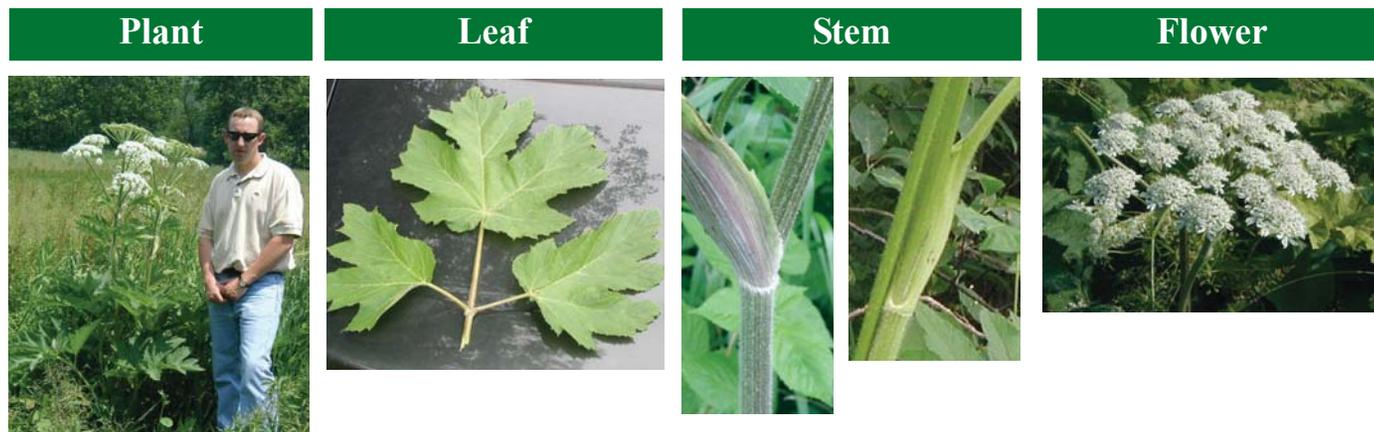


Rosette of leaves

...Leaf clusters sprout from overwintering roots each year for 2-4 years until the plant flowers.

Similar Plants Commonly Mistaken for Giant Hogweed

Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*), a native plant, is most likely to be confused with Giant Hogweed. Cow Parsnip is smaller, reaching a height of 5-8' in Michigan. Unlike Giant Hogweed, the stem maybe entirely green or have a slight purplish cast, is deeply ridged and only up to 1-2" in diameter. Hairs on Cow Parsnip are fine, soft and fuzzy, rather than coarse like those on Giant Hogweed. Although present on both leaf surfaces, the soft hairs occur primarily on the lower surface and give the leaves a velvety appearance. Mature leaves measure up to 2 to 2 ½' in diameter. Cow Parsnip generally flowers from early June through early July in Michigan, typically several weeks before Giant Hogweed, and produces much smaller, flat topped flower clusters.



Angelica (*Angelica atropurpurea*) is easily distinguished from Giant Hogweed by its uniformly waxy green to purple, smooth hollow stems and compound, globular, softball-sized clusters of white or greenish-white flowers less than 1' in diameter. Angelica is shorter than Giant Hogweed, seldom attaining a height of 8'. The mature compound leaves can reach widths of 2' and have dozens of small leaflets. This plant typically flowers from mid May through mid June in Michigan.



Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is a multi-branched, non-native biennial ranging from 4 to 9' tall. The waxy stem has purple blotches, and the entire plant is smooth. Leaves are bright green, fern-like and may appear glossy. Small white flowers are arranged in numerous, small, flat-topped clusters on all the branches. Poison Hemlock has a disagreeable "mousy" odor, and the entire plant is poisonous if ingested. It generally flowers in late May through late June in Michigan.

