Giant Hogweed

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Important Facts

~ Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is an ornamental plant introduced into gardens in the British Isles from south-west Asia in the nineteenth century.

~ It has spread and is now found mostly in the south and west of Northern Ireland, close to flowing water. It is especially common along the banks of the Upper Bann, Lagan, Ballinderry and Blackwater Rivers.

~ The sap causes severe skin irritation when the affected area is exposed to sunlight.

Gaint Hogweed aims to make those who work and play close to watercourses aware of the dangers of giant hogweed, and give advice on its control.

It is important to recognise that common hogweed and other members of the Umbelliferae family can cause similar skin irritation.

Identifying Giant Hogweed

~ The plants can be easily identified by their enormous size, often 3-4 m tall.

~ The leaves are divided and are 1m or more wide.

~ The stem and leaf stalks are reddish in colour and covered in bristles. The many flowers are small, white and grouped together in clusters, called ‘umbels’. Giant hogweed flowers from June to September.

~ Common hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), also known as cow parsnip, is unlikely to be confused with giant hogweed because it is smaller and more widespread, especially along roadside verges and hedgerows.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Why is Giant Hogweed a problem?

~ Giant hogweed contains a large amount of sap. This sap is released if the stem or leaf stalk is cut, or if the bristles on the leaves are touched. Its close relative, the common hogweed, and other members of the Umbelliferae family also release sap but in smaller quantities.

~ The sap of all the Umbelliferae, but especially giant hogweed, contains substances called furocoumarins which, on contact, make the skin very sensitive to light. Exposure of affected skin, even for short periods, produces reactions ranging from a mild rash, similar to hives, to painful watery blisters which are slow to heal and may require medical treatment. Occasionally, contact with giant hogweed leads to recurrent dermatitis.

~ Children are especially at risk. They are often attracted to the plant by the hollow stems for use as 'pea shooters' or 'telescopes' which can lead to blistering around the face.

~ Anyone attempting to control giant hogweed, especially by cutting, is also at risk. The skin blistering is often referred to as 'strimmer's disease' because garden and industrial strimmer's spread the sap widely when giant hogweed plants are cut.

~ Large colonies of giant hogweed shade out and eventually exclude, native ground vegetation.

Limiting the spread of Giant Hogweed

Any strategy to limit the spread of giant hogweed should aim to:

~ identify and eliminate isolated colonies or individual plants before they can act as sources of seed for invasion of larger areas. Each plant can produce up to 5,000 seeds in one season, many of which are shed into flowing water which carries them downstream to establish new colonies;

~ start treatment of riverbanks at the furthest point upstream where giant hogweed is known to occur and then work downstream;

~ check sites where control measures have been taken and repeat them every year until no more seedlings appear.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Chemical Methods

Glyphosate:

~ Good control of giant hogweed and common hogweed can be achieved by applying glyphosate during April-May when the plants are actively growing but still small enough to be easily treated.

~ Glyphosate is non-selective so care must be taken when applying it close to desirable plants.

~ Glyphosate is available in various products, including Barclay Gallup (*Barclay*), Helosate (*Helm*), Roundup Pro (*Monsanto*), Roundup Pro Biactive (*Monsanto*) and Spasor (*RP Environmental Products*).

~ For professional use, apply glyphosate by knapsack sprayer fitted with an appropriate jet, using the manufacturer's recommended rate. Ensure thorough wetting of the foliage but without run-off onto surrounding vegetation. For spot application, a 1:50 dilution with water is recommended.

~ In some situations, seedlings may germinate after application and a follow up treatment may be necessary.

NOTE
All the glyphosate products mentioned are approved for use near waterways. However, before using these products near a watercourse you must give written notification to the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, Environmental Protection, Calvert House, 23 Castle Place, Belfast BT1 1FY, Telephone (028) 9025 4754.

Triclopyr

~ Triclopyr is a selective herbicide which is safer to use with grasses but most woody and broadleaved plants are susceptible.

This chemical should not be used near water.

~ Triclopyr is sold as Garlon 4 (*Nomix-chipman*), Garlon 2 (*Syngenta*) and Timbrell (*Dow*)

~ Use triclopyr in spring or early summer as an overall or spot treatment.

Read the label before you buy and carefully follow the manufacturers' directions for use – USE PESTICIDES SAFELY.

Always follow guidance within the 'Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Prevention of Pollution of Water'.

Non-chemical methods

~ Do not cut plants at or near ground level since this encourages vigorous regrowth from the base of the plant. Individual plants may be killed by cutting them below ground level with a spade. However, cutting is laborious and may miss younger plants if carried out in early summer. It is not practical for control of dense colonies.

~ Wear adequate protective clothing, including rubber gloves and boots. It is very important to prevent the plant or the sap coming into contact with the skin, especially the face. A face shield is recommended.

Strimming

~ Always wear adequate protective clothing when using a strimmer to control vegetation along areas such as riverbanks, hedgerow bottoms and roadside verges.

~ Common hogweed and other members of the Umbelliferae may be present in areas along with giant hogweed. Since these plants can cause similar skin irritation, their sap should be prevented from coming into contact with the skin.

Ploughing

~ Ploughing normally gives total control where seedlings and young plants encroach onto agricultural land.

Grazing

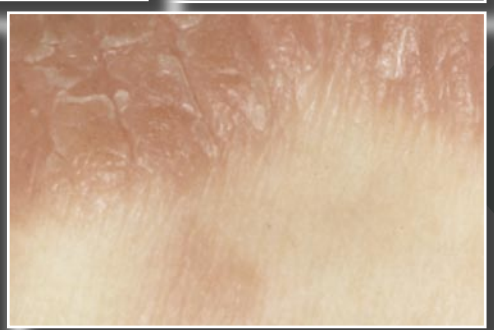
~ Cattle suffer no ill-effects after eating giant hogweed and can help keep it under control in agricultural situations.

Giant hogweed

– the plant and the results of contact with its sap

Giant hogweed
– stem cross-section

Rash on back and legs
– skin irritation is caused by exposure to bright sunlight after contact with giant hogweed sap.

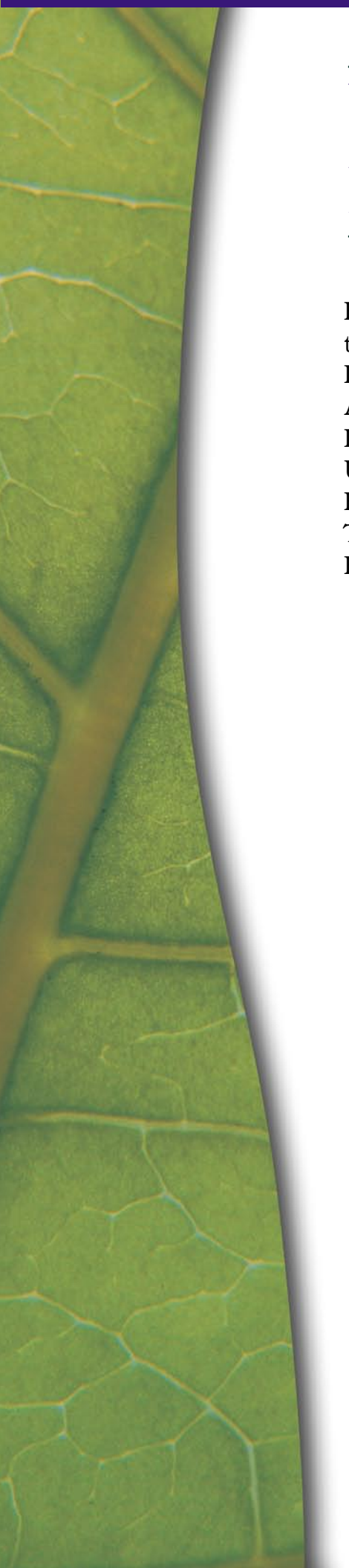


Blistering on hands and forearm
– reaction to giant hogweed sap can vary from a mild rash to severe blisters.

Recommended First Aid after skin contamination:
Seek medical advice if an itchy rash or blisters develop - inform your doctor if you think you have been in contact with giant hogweed.

Acknowledgement – these photographs were kindly supplied by Professor D Burrows, Department of Dermatology, Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

FURTHER INFORMATION



Further information

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