

GIANT HOGWEED

Heracleum mantegazzianum



Giant Hogweed (GH)

Giant hogweed is a federally listed noxious weed with a limited nationwide distribution. Pennsylvania, New York and Washington state have the largest number of known giant hogweed sites. GH is capable of forming a monoculture in all habitats but especially riparian areas and wetland communities, displacing native or beneficial plants and because of its poisonous sap poses a serious health threat to humans.

History

In the early 1800's immigrants from Eurasia introduced giant hogweed into the United States and in the early 1900's the plant was sold as a ornamental landscape planting promoted for its huge size. A slow spreading species, it took more than a half century for authorities to notice the increasing number of escapes from cultivation and the increasing reports of serious burns from the poisonous sap.

Giant hogweed has since become established in naturalized areas in U.S. Plant Hardiness Zones 5, 6 and 7. There are few reports if any of established, persisting populations from Zone 1– 4 or 8–11. In 1983, the USDA/APHIS declared the plant a federal noxious weed and targeted giant hogweed for eradication nationwide.

Subsequently, an herbarium search found U.S records from 1816 through 1960 from 10 continental states. As of 2010, GH had been found in 17 states.

Giant Hogweed in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Morris Arboretum of the University of Philadelphia and Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh had no herbarium collections or observations of naturalized populations of *H. mantegazzianum* through 1979. After conducting the USDA surveys in 1985, PDA discovered a significant amount of giant hogweed in Western PA. It was added to the Pennsylvania Noxious Weed Control List in 2000.

Giant Hogweed Control Program

The PDA and USDA/APHIS launched the GH Hotline in 1998 and created the [giant hogweed brochures](#) to promote awareness of this poisonous plant. Since the state program began, over 500 sites have been found in 17 counties. More than 55% of the

populations are in Erie County. Nearby sites are known in Crawford, Mercer, McKean, Venango, and Warren, and isolated sites are known from Elk, Potter, Butler, Blair, Huntingdon, Cumberland, Chester, Lebanon, Carbon, Susquehanna, and Wayne counties.

The targeted eradication program has been very successful and as of 2010 more than 300 of these sites have been declared eradicated.

Each season, between May and August, field staff in the Noxious Weed Program are surveying active sites; assisting property owners with control measures; monitoring released sites; and responding to the hotline calls.

How You Can Help

If you believe you have discovered giant hogweed please report it by calling the Noxious Weed Hotline at 1-877-464-9333.

The [GH Brochure](#) contains detailed images of GH and look-a-like plants and information on the burn caused by this plant's poisonous sap. It is available on the web or can be ordered from PDA.





Seedling cotyledon emergence shape in spring



Seedlings can be distinguished from 2nd year perennial plants because they retain this leaf shape all season long



2nd year or older leaf shape



Mature hogweed rosette as it looks when bolting a flower stalk

Giant Hogweed Description

GH is the largest member of the carrot family. An annual plant, it is considered a long-lived biennial in PA.

The plant starts its life cycle each spring as a rosette and after several years of growing larger and larger the rosette bolts a flower stalk.

The poisonous sap is contained in all parts of the plant and it

most concentrated in the root. Once a plant bolts a single flower stalk that plant dies but the seeds produced are viable for many years in the soil.

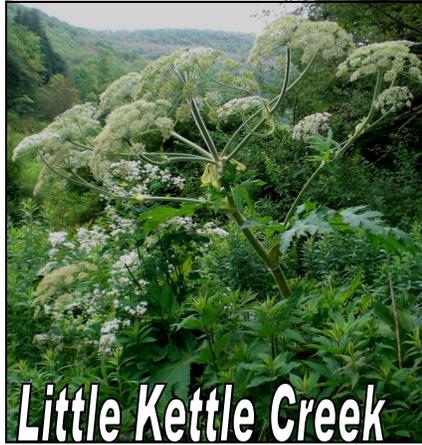
Leaves are lobed, deeply incised and up to 5 ft. in width.

Stems are hollow, ridged and 2-4 in. in diameter. Stems are also purple colored or green with purple blotches and are covered in coarse white hairs.

Flowers start out as a distinctive "croup" on the stem. The flower head is white and flowers are clustered in a flat top umbel with a central flower surrounded by smaller ray flowers. All together the flowering structure can be up to 2 ft. in width. Overall height can reach 15 ft.

Similar Species

Our native **cow parsnip** is also a *Heracleum* species and looks very similar to giant hogweed. The stem, leaves and flower head of cow parsnip are much smaller and because cow parsnip is a perennial in PA, most all plants in a cow parsnip cluster are in flower at the same time and tend to flower much earlier in the season. Other white umbel flowering species often mistaken for GH are **elderberry, angelica, and poison hemlock.**



Biology/ Ecology

A typical infestation of GH in June is comprised of seedling plants; immature rosettes and bolting rosettes and/or flowering plants. Plants thrive in rich wet soils and are found most often in homeowner flowerbeds or nearby where the plants have escaped to roadside shoulders, the edges of woods, into wet meadows and throughout riparian areas along streams.



Once established in a stream corridor, the rate of spread becomes exponential and the infestation quickly spreads downstream by dispersal of thousands of seeds produced each year from a single flowering plant. **Little Kettle Creek** in Potter County and **Lebouf Creek** in Erie County are the only two streams infested in PA. Stopping giant hogweed from spreading into more streams is a major priority.