

**No 12**

**GIANT HOGWEED**

**WHAT?**

Introduced as an ornamental plant 150 years ago, Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is now wide spread throughout the UK. It is a perennial plant that flowers only in its 4<sup>th</sup> year of growth and, having flowered, it dies.

Throughout its life each plant can grow to over 5m tall and its flowers can disperse as many as 50,000 seeds allowing the species to spread rapidly and widely. These seeds can remain viable on or in the ground for up to 15 years.

It thrives in any habitat but particularly where soil has been disturbed such as riverbanks, derelict land or railway embankments.



**Identification**

- Giant Hogweed grows up to 5m tall.
- The stem starts growing in March / April and is green but develops dark red / purple spots or blotches during summer. It is hollow, furrowed or ribbed, has sparse spiky hairs and can be 100 mm across.
- Leaves are dark green, have deeply cut lobes with ragged edges, can be 1 metre across and form in a rosette.
- Flowers are white, umbrella like and up to 500 mm across and appear from June in the 4<sup>th</sup> year
- Seedpods, which are beige, are produced from August to October.

**WHY?**

- ❑ **Health hazard:** The plant contains large amounts of poisonous sap, which, on contact with the skin and in the presence of sunlight, causes severe irritation, swelling and painful watery blisters. This reaction can occur up to 24 hours after exposure to sunlight. Contact with eyes can cause temporary blindness.
- ❑ **Avoid environmental harm:** As it spreads it endangers the survival of native plants. The loss of other vegetation may lead to excessive erosion of soil as the giant hogweed dies back in winter. Giant Hogweed can cause significant harm to grazing animals.
- ❑ **Avoid prosecution:** It is illegal "to plant or otherwise encourage" the growth of Giant Hogweed. This could include moving surrounding soil which may contain either seeds or plant material unless as part of an eradication process.

**DO**

- ✓ IMMEDIATELY stop all work near to the suspect plant and contact your line manager for instructions if you think you have identified Giant Hogweed on your site.
- ✓ Seek medical advice if you have been in contact with the sap.
- ✓ Wear protective clothing before touching the plant.

**DON'T**

- ✗ DON'T handle the plant until further advice is taken.
- ✗ DON'T move soil that may contain seeds without specific instructions.

*If you require any further information please contact your Environmental Adviser 07812042830*