

Invasive Species Watch: Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

Giant hogweed is an invasive plant species capable of growing to a size befitting its name. Perhaps most concerning, giant hogweed is a dangerous plant that should not be touched.

It truly is a large plant. Giant hogweed leaves can be up to five feet across, and it reaches heights of eight to 14 feet tall when it is flowering. The central stem is hollow, with purple blotches and coarse white hairs emerging from it. Clusters of small white flowers, similar in appearance to Queen Anne's Lace, form a large umbrella shape at the top of the plant.

The sap of the plant is quite dangerous. It contains chemicals called photosensitizing furanocoumarins which can cause a person's skin to lose the ability to protect itself from sunlight. Exposure to the sap and sunlight can result in severe skin burns, blistering, and permanent scarring. Contact with the eyes can even result in blindness.

Giant hogweed is native to the Caucasus Region that separates Europe and Asia near the Black and Caspian Seas. Over the last century, it has spread across Europe and into North America after being introduced into non-native areas as an ornamental plant. Currently, the plant is found in most regions of New York State, with higher concentrations located in Western and Central New York.

Sightings of giant hogweed should be reported to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). It is especially helpful to provide the specific location of the plant along with high resolution photos of it to confirm its identification.

Anybody coming across a giant hogweed plant should take care and avoid touching the plant.

To report a sighting of Giant Hogweed, please contact the DEC by phone at (845) 256-3111 or via email at ghogweed@dec.ny.gov. More information about this invasive species can be found at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html.

