

# TACKLING Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

Invasive species have significant impacts on the environment, human health, infrastructure and the economy in the Metro Vancouver region.

Giant hogweed is one of the highest priority invasive plants to control in the Metro Vancouver region because it is toxic. It can grow under a variety of conditions, but prefers to grow in wet areas in parks, forest edges, gardens and along streams.

## IMPACTS

**Giant hogweed sap can cause significant burns to the skin after exposure to sunlight.** Blistering, scarring and skin irritation can re-occur for several years. Sap may cause blindness if rubbed in the eyes. As the name suggests, giant hogweed grows very large, quickly outcompeting native plants. Provincial regulations require land owners to control this plant.

## IDENTIFICATION

Giant hogweed can easily be mistaken for other native and invasive plants. Identification should be confirmed by an expert.

- **Lifecycle:** Perennial plant that lives for at least two years; above-ground portions of the plant die back in winter
- **Stems:** Flowering stalk 2-5 metres tall, up to 10 centimetres in diameter, usually with bristles and purple spots
- **Leaves:** Dark green, up to 3 metres long, divided into 2-3 lobes, with highly jagged edges
- **Flowers:** Large clusters of white flowers 20-50 centimetres across; plants flower only after a year or more of growth



Flowering stem

CREDIT: ISCMV



Leaves

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Young plant emerging from the ground

CREDIT: ISCMV

- **Seeds:** Thin oval seeds, 6-18 millimetres long; green turning dry and brown when ripe; a mature plant can spread 20,000-100,000 seeds each year



## PREVENTION AND CONTROL

To prevent further spread across the region and beyond, it is best not to purchase, trade, or grow giant hogweed. If this plant is already present, it is critical to ensure it does not invade adjacent yards, parks and natural areas. Effective invasive plant management typically involves a variety of control methods. The following table summarizes the recommended techniques for controlling giant hogweed on private property or where permission has been granted by the land owner or manager. Other methods may be used by professionals. **It is best to hire a professional to manage giant hogweed infestations. Protective gear (gloves, goggles or a face shield, a suit and boots) should be used, as all parts of giant hogweed contain toxic sap that can cause significant burns.**

CONTROL STRATEGY	TECHNIQUES	SUITABLE SITES	NOTES
Manual	In spring, use a shovel or loppers to cut the main root 5-15 centimetres below the soil surface	Individual plants, sites with less than 100 plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cut flower clusters first to prevent seed spread and dispose as per below</li><li>• Cut back the stem of larger plants first for easier access to roots</li><li>• May re-sprout</li></ul>
	Cut off the flower clusters from May to July to prevent seeds from forming	Individual plants that are too large to control using other methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will not kill the plant</li><li>• New flowers may form after cutting</li></ul>

For disposal, cut plants into smaller pieces, double-bag in heavy garbage bags, seal tightly and dispose as garbage waste. Monitor sites each year in the spring to identify and remove new seedlings. Restore the area with native or non-invasive plants only after the giant hogweed is no longer present.

## How Can You Help?

- Do not touch suspected giant hogweed plants.
- Download the '[Report Invasives BC](#)' app to identify and report invasive species.
- Control invasive plants and replace them with a non-invasive alternative. Check out [growgreenguide.ca](http://growgreenguide.ca) for suggestions.
- Do not place giant hogweed in your backyard composter due to the risk of exposure. The temperature will also not become hot enough to completely destroy the seeds and roots.
- To reduce the spread of invasive species, dispose of yard waste and soil appropriately. Visit your municipality's website for more information.

For the complete set of best management practices for giant hogweed, and other key invasive species, visit [MetroVancouver.org](http://MetroVancouver.org) and search 'Invasive Species'.



Professionals wear personal protective gear when tackling giant hogweed  
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