Giant Hogweed

Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Heracleum mantegazzianum*

**AKA:** Efwr enfawr (Welsh)

**Native to:** Caucasus mountains in south west Russia and Georgia

**Habitat:** Widespread, most common on river banks

Easy to identify when fully grown by height, size of leaves and size of flowers. Can be confused with native hogweed when not fully grown or when growth is stunted (e.g. regrowth after cutting).

Introduced as an ornamental. First recorded wild in the UK in the late 19th century. Spreads solely by seeds, mainly through deliberate planting, wind dispersal and in water courses. Now common across much of the UK. Contact with any part of this plant must be avoided as even minute amounts of sap can cause blistering of the skin following exposure to sunlight. Other negative impacts include out-competing native flora, river bank erosion and increase in flood risk. Can cause delays/additional costs on development sites where the plant must be removed as controlled waste in order to comply with legislation.

Giant hogweed is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause this species to grow in the wild. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, giant hogweed is also classified as controlled waste.

For details of legislation go to [www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation).

Key ID Features

- **Sharply divided / serrated leaves**
- **Bristles on underside**
- **Blotchy or rarely continuous purple**
- **Up to 80cm**
- **Umbrella shaped flower**
- **Up to 5m**
- **Stems usually with sharp bristles**
- **Up to 50,000 seeds per plant held on seed head**
- **Flower white or rarely pinkish**
- **Stem 5-10cm diameter**
- **Up to 5m**
- **Seeds have dark stripes (oil ducts) 2 on one side, 4 on the reverse**
Identification throughout the year

Spring

Summer

Winter

Similar Species

Hogweed
Native
(Heracleum sphondylium)

Giant Hogweed

When in full height it is difficult to confuse giant hogweed with any other plant. While still growing or stunted, possibly as a result of disturbance, it can be confused with some other native plants. The most likely species with which it might confused is hogweed.

Key differences between hogweed and giant hogweed include the height, width of stem, size of leaf, size of flower head and size of seed.

Hogweed flowers heads are much smaller, up to 15cm

Reference and further reading:


Distribution

Widespread and common across much of the UK. Extensive infestations are found particularly in Scotland and the north of England. Less abundant in Cornwall. Often associated with large rivers.

Source: NBN Gateway. Check website for current distribution

Photos from: Olaf Booy, Steve Smith, Vicky White