



Giant Hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum

Invasive Plant Alert



One of the biggest threats to natural ecosystems in Saanich is the spread of invasive non-native plants. The District of Saanich appreciates the cooperation of all residents in removing Giant Hogweed from private property.

For assistance please contact:

On Private Land:

Saanich Environmental Services:
250-475-5471 or plansec@saanich.ca.

On Public Lands:

Saanich Parks:
250-475-5522 or parks@saanich.ca.



Why is giant hogweed a problem?

- **PUBLIC HEALTH HAZARD:** may cause severe skin burns, scarring and temporary or permanent blindness.
- Clear, watery sap in the stem and leaves can cause blistering and scarring of the skin. The active agent furanocoumarin causes skin to be sensitive to ultraviolet radiation in sunlight. If contact is made, wash well with soap and water, keep affected area out of sunlight, and treat as a surface burn. Avoid sunlight for 1-2 weeks to prevent blistering.
- Vigorous early season growth and tolerance to a wide variety of environmental conditions make this escaped garden ornamental highly competitive with native flora, and difficult to eradicate.
- On steep slopes and along stream banks, giant hogweed's shallow root system can cause soil erosion.

What does it look like?

- Large hairy plant, up to 6m tall.
- Hollow green stems with reddish-purple spots can be 5 to 10 cm in diameter.
- Deeply lobed, coarsely-toothed leaves in 3 large segments up to 1.5 m across.
- Small white flowers form a broad umbrella-shaped flower head up to 1m across.
- **Look for:** Huge size; purple spots on stem; broad white flower head (May-July); distinctive leaf shape.

Could be confused with:

- Cow-parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*): smaller plant (<2m); with no reddish-purple spots on stems; leaves not as incised or sharply toothed. Cow-parsnip has coarse hairs at the base of leaf stalks.
- Seaside angelica (*Angelica lucida*): similar and related; smaller (to 1.5m), leaves are hairless and divided into groups of 3.
- Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*): similar and related, but much smaller.
- Palmate coltsfoot (*Petasites frigidus* var. *palmatus*): similar leaves, but this low-lying ground cover only grows to 10-50cm, with a rounded flower head.

Distribution:

- Introduced from Asia as an ornamental garden plant in Europe, United Kingdom, USA and Canada. It has now naturalized in many of these places, especially along waterways.
- Oldest population in western Canada is near French Creek on Vancouver Island, where it became established before 1960. Giant Hogweed is now found from Sooke to Courtenay, in the Gulf Islands and the Lower Fraser Valley and dominates many roadsides, vacant lots and stream banks.

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Habitat and biology:

- Perennial plant in the Apiaceae (carrot or parsley) family. It takes 3-5 years to germinate and produce flowers.
- Mature plants flower May - July; each one can produce up to 100,000 seeds which may remain viable in the soil for up to 15 years. Most plants die after flowering and setting seed, but side shoots could grow the next year.
- Giant hogweed can also reproduce via perennial buds that form on the crown and tuberous rootstock.
- Large taproot (to 12cm thick and 45cm long) stores energy and provides a buffer in case the above ground parts are damaged. If mowed or browsed, rapidly re-sprouts and forms new leaves and flower stalk.
- Prefers rich damp soil; tolerates a wide range of light conditions.
- Common along ditches, roadsides, riparian areas, wooded ravines and disturbed sites.

What should you do?

Caution: Special precautions are necessary in dealing with this plant, due to the hazards associated with the sap. Wear protective clothing: gloves, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, rubber boots and full-face protection.

Wash clothing and tools afterwards.

- **First priority: Remove flower heads:** This short-term control measure will prevent dispersal but will not kill the plant. Do not compost flowering parts (seeds may still form and disperse). Seal in garbage bags, label and dispose as outlined below.

Small populations (<100 plants):

- **Manually cut roots:** Use a sharp long-handled shovel or spade to cut the roots a minimum of 8–12 cm below the soil surface in spring (early April to mid-May); repeat in early summer (to mid-July) to treat any plants that were missed or have re-sprouted. Pulling the whole root out causes soil disturbance which can create favourable conditions for seeds in the soil bank to germinate.

Large populations:

- **Mow repeatedly:** Before plants go to seed, for 1- 5 years. Plants will continue to re-sprout from the taproot, but repeated treatments will eventually weaken and kill giant hogweed. Monitor for re-growth in June, before flowers form.
- Cut stems and leaves of giant hogweed will not re-sprout, so leave cut plants to decompose on site unless there is a risk that people will touch them. In that case, bag all plant material, label "toxic hogweed" and dispose as outlined below.
- **Wash all tools:** Reduce the risk of skin contact with plant sap.
- **Mulch deeply (30-40cm):** Cover with geo-textiles or wood chips after treatment to prevent germination of new plants.
- **Monitor** regularly for re-growth, and remove any new plants that appear.

Proper Disposal

- The District of Saanich is in the process of developing options for invasive species disposal. Please call Environmental Services or check the website for updates www.invasives.saanich.ca.
- Currently, the best option is to place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled "invasive species" and take to Hartland Landfill.
- **DO NOT COMPOST!** Flowers can still form viable seeds after removal.

Other resources

Invasive Plant Council of BC
Coastal Invasive Plant
Committee
King County Noxious Weed
Program
Invasive Alien Plant Program

Who do you call?

Contact Saanich Environmental Services for positive identification and to learn about giant hogweed and other invasive species removal efforts in your area.

On Private Land:

Saanich Environmental Services:

250-475-5471 or plansec@saanich.ca.

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Noxious Weeds Bylaw No. 8080:

The District of Saanich requires all landowners clear their property of any noxious weeds and other vegetation that could spread or become a nuisance