

PESTIMONIAL

News from the Outsmart Invasive Species Project
July 19th, 2012

Many invasive species can be a threat to native plants, but some can do serious harm to humans as well...

Painful blisters, redness and swelling, itchy irritated eyes, even blindness. Conditions that might result from exposure to a toxic chemical like mustard gas, these can also be the consequences of exposure to a toxic invasive plant: Giant hogweed.

The clear, watery sap of giant hogweed contains chemicals called furocoumarins, which the plant produces to defend itself against parasites. These toxic substances occur in the tissues of a variety of fruits and vegetables, but those found in the sap of giant hogweed can cause a severe reaction in some people.

Direct contact with the skin can result in photo-dermatitis, an abnormal immune-system response to ultra violet rays. In other words, the sap of giant hogweed can make you allergic to sunlight.

In addition to its toxic effect on people, giant hogweed can cause problems for native species. The aptly named weed reaches a towering height of 15 feet, with a flower head that spans up to 2.5 feet – like a giant parasol. Its stature gives it an unfair advantage, allowing it to easily crowd out other plants.

OUTSMART UPDATE



Total reports: 215

What to look for now:
Japanese stiltgrass



Photo: Bill Johnson, NPS

A native of the Caucus Mountains, giant hogweed made its way to the United States the same way many invasive plants do, as an ornamental - surely due to its novel size.

Since giant hogweed is a federally listed noxious weed, it is illegal to import it to the United States, or transport it across state lines. But it has been seen on the loose in New York, Pennsylvania, Maine, Michigan, Washington, Washington D.C., and Massachusetts. So be on the lookout!



Giant hogweed in bloom.

Photo: Duncan Revell, BBC

Familiarize yourself with the ID tips on the next page so you can spot this invasive menace, but always proceed with caution, and keep an eye on pets. Dogs may also have an allergic reaction to the sap.

Pigs, on the other hand, can graze on the plant with no ill effect. So sic your hogs on hogweed!

Japanese Stiltgrass

ID in a nutshell:

The pale green leaves of this sprawling grass are asymmetrical, lance-shaped, 1 to 3 inches long, and bear a **distinct shiny midrib**.



Photo: Matt Pelikan, MV Times



Photos: Chris Evans, UGA

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

Straight out of Alice in Wonderland, giant hogweed is like an enormous, sinister, Queen Anne's Lace. Here are some tips to help you ID it:

Habitat: Giant hogweed likes rich, moist soils, and partial shade. Look for it in floodplains, along stream banks, and in disturbed areas like railroad beds

Size: 10 to 15 feet tall

Flowers: Small white flower clusters bloom from late spring to midsummer, forming a broad head with a 2 to 2.5 foot in diameter

Stem: Hollow, covered with purple blistery spots and bristles, with a diameter of 2 to 4 inches

Leaves: Alternate, deeply incised compound leaves grow up to 5 feet wide, and bear stiff, dense hairs on the underside.

Fruits: Flattened oval-shaped fruit with ridged margins, about 3/8 of an inch long

Similar species: Cow parsnip, angelica, wild parsnip, wild chervil, Queen Anne's Lace, poison hemlock and Golden Alexanders

Not sure? Check out these references for distinguishing it from similar species:

<http://www.eddmaps.org/ipane/ipanespecies/comparisontable.htm>

http://massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/hogweed/giant_hogweed_photos.htm



Photos: UConn Horticulture

References:

Kaufman, S. R. and W. Kaufman. 2007. *Invasive Plants: Guide to Identification and the Impacts and Control of Common North American Species*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). 2002. *Giant Hogweed Factsheet*. United States Department of Agriculture.

What to do if you find giant hogweed? **Hands off!** Avoid contact, and report the plant immediately. If you have a smartphone, use the Outsmart app. Otherwise, take a photo, and submit a report through EDDMaps: <http://www.eddmaps.org/outsmart/join.cfm>, or through the Massachusetts Introduced Pest Outreach Project: <http://massnrc.org/pests/hogweedreport.aspx>

Trained experts may be able to dig up individuals, or apply herbicide to young plants.

Remember, if you are unsure about a plant's identity, err on the side of caution. The Outsmart app has been updated to allow you to report an "unknown plant" or an "unlisted plant". So now you can report something that stumps you, or any invasive species that are not already on the Outsmart target list.

Thanks for your efforts. Keep up the great work!

The Outsmart Invasive Species Project Team

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