

Treatment of Giant Hogweed

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a highly invasive non-native weed species, that can pose a health risk if touched.

Health risk

The stems, edges and undersides of the leaves bear small hairs containing an irritant sap, and the slightest touch causes painful blistering and severe skin irritation. Contact with cut material in sunlight produces a skin reaction in almost all cases. Blistering symptoms occur 24- 48 hours after exposure, and dense pigmentation is visible after 3 – 5 days. This may persist for 6 years or more. When dealing with Giant hogweed protective clothing must be worn.

Legislation: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides the primary controls on the release of non-native species into the wild in Great Britain. **It is an offence under section 14(2) of the Act to ‘plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild’ any plant listed in Schedule 9, Part II. This includes Giant Hogweed**

In addition local authorities can use the section 79 (1) of the Law of Statutory Nuisance to deal with Giant hogweed where it is deemed to be a danger to the general public.

The principle behind the concept of Statutory Nuisance dates directly back to the 19th century and was brought about in an attempt to deal with the problems identified at that time, the main aim being the **protection of public health**. That underlying concept is still the main drive behind all the listed “matters” in Section 79.

Recognition



It can be distinguished from common hogweed and cow parsley by its characteristic size. Its leaves can grow to 1.5m across and have a ragged spiky appearance. Stems are green with dark-red or purple blotches, are hollow and in mature specimens can be 100mm across and up to 5m tall. In June – July the plants produce large white umbrella-like flower heads up to 500mm across see photo below

Treatment

The aim of any treatment is to kill the plant or to prevent flowering/seeding.

Any treatment works must be carried out with the greatest of care and operatives **must** wear protective clothing, including gloves and a face visor to protect themselves from the sap of the plant and any herbicide they are using.

Chemical control

Please note the use of any herbicides must be done in accordance with the instructions supplied with the chemical. If you are unsure please contact the supplier or a licensed spraying contractor. Further spraying near to a watercourse is restricted and requires written permission from SEPA.

Chemical control is a most effective method to kill the plant. Spraying can start as soon as the plant is about 1m high, usually in May and continue throughout the summer. More than one application in any one season is often necessary, in particular to eliminate regeneration from the soil seed source. Follow-up spraying will be required to kill seedlings in subsequent years and it is recommended that the site is monitored for a period of five years.

The herbicide should be applied during favourable weather i.e. not windy to prevent drift and not raining to prevent wash off.

The herbicide should be applied directly to the plants, using either a sprayer with a coarse/large droplet size or more directly using a weed wiper.

The plant should show die back within two weeks, dead leaves and stalks should be allowed to dry and can then be disposed of preferably by burning, or digging into the soil.

It should be noted that the flower heads on any plants that survive chemical treatment should be removed to prevent the production of seeds. These heads should be either buried at least 1m deep on site or incinerated.

It is recommended that only a **glyphosate based herbicide is used such as "Roundup"**. Particularly if spraying close to a water course

Further the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Stirling office 01786 452595) should be informed prior to any spraying works adjacent to a watercourse **and immediately** in the case of any spillage into either the water or soil adjacent to the watercourse. If a spillage does occur it must be soaked up immediately using dry sand or soil, bagged and removed off site for appropriate disposal.

The herbicide must be stored and mixed away from any watercourse.

Non chemical control:

Where chemical control is not possible or desirable, alternative treatments can be used. In particular the root of individual plants may be dug out or split just below ground level, this provides good control and prevents re-growth, however it is important that operatives wear protective clothing to protect them from any sap.

Further grazing by cows and sheep will help suppress growth but will not necessarily eradicate the hogweed.

Further information can be obtained from Audrey Morrison by either phoning on 01786 462824 or by email morrisona@stirling.gov.uk.