



Attention News Editor:

News Release

For Immediate Release

May 19, 2010

Giant Hogweed

As the Victoria Day weekend approaches, it is a good time to remind anyone hiking, camping, canoeing or just enjoying the natural attraction of Grey Bruce to be aware of poisonous plants. Most people already know to stay away from poison ivy, but there are other poisonous plants to avoid, including Giant Hogweed.

Giant Hogweed is a perennial plant that can grow 1 to 5.5 metres tall. The leaves are large, deeply cut with sharp coarse teeth, reaching widths in excess of 1 metre. The stems are covered in coarse, whisker-like hairs with red/purple spots. The flowers are white, umbrella shaped and up to 1.2 metres tall. Giant Hogweed is found along rivers, streams and wet land areas, but can also be found in pastureland. At this time of the year, it can be harder to distinguish the plant as it has not yet grown to its full potential and isn't flowering.

If you see Giant Hogweed, DO NOT TOUCH IT. Giant hogweed can be a serious health hazard. This plant produces a clear watery sap from the leaves and especially the stem. The sap contains *furancoumarin* that causes the skin to be photosensitive. After contact with Giant Hogweed, exposure to sunlight may cause severe blistering, burns and sometimes inflamed lesions on the skin. The reaction of the skin depends on individual sensitivity. Avoid contact with eyes as temporary or permanent blindness can result.

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If contact occurs, seek immediate shelter as exposure to sap makes human skin hypersensitive to sunlight. Wash exposed skin with soap and water. If the skin reacts, seek medical attention.

Attempting to remove these plants without the proper precautions may put you at risk of coming into contact with the clear watery sap and can help the plant spread its seed. Contact your local municipality to identify areas of Giant Hogweed and for appropriate control measures.

The following websites provide excellent information and photos on Giant Hogweed and other poisonous plants.

http://www.weedinfo.ca/media/pdf/1683_gianthogweed_public_fa.pdf

www.ontarioweeds.com

For further information call, Public Health at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-23456 or visit our website at www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca.

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Attachments: Photo Giant Hogweed

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