

Golf Course Invader

Hogsbane, cartwheel flower, giant cow parsley, giant cow parsnip, giant hogweed - whatever you know this biennial as, you need to be aware of its potential to cause serious health issues at your place of work.

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), made its way over to the UK from the Caucasus Mountains region of Georgia, Russia in the early nineteenth century. Whilst initially contained within the boundaries of gardens, it soon spread into the outside world where it was particularly happy in wasteland and alongside waterways.

How to identify Hogweed

You really can't miss it as it can grow to 3.5 metres in height and has an enormous collection of flowers on top. I have to say that it is an attractive plant with some benefit to the environmental world, namely as a source of nectar for pollinating insects, however its identity should be known to all who work on golf courses. The following bullet points highlight the more conspicuous parts of the plant:

- Height up to 3.5 metres (11.4 ft.)
- Flowers are approximately 60cm across (2ft.)
- Stems are purple (sometimes dark red) and blotched
- Biennial but sometimes perennial with shoots returning year after year



Photos: Giant hogweed

How do we deal with it?

Chemical controls: There are numerous ways to eradicate this unwanted plant from your golf course including treating it with a herbicide; triclopyr based products will work after a number of applications and will not damage the surrounding turf. Glyphosate is more effective but will damage any plant it comes into contact with, so be warned! Contact weed killers are much less effective and will take more applications over a longer period of time so, there are pros and cons to all the aforementioned actions. Also, be aware of all spraying requirements prior to any work being carried out.

Cultural controls: If your course is showing signs of new growth from giant hogweed then the simple route is to pull it out when it is young and prior to flowering (April/ May). Larger areas may need professional help in the shape of teams with trimmers, brush cutters etc. It is imperative however, that the correct PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) is used at all times, especially when dealing with giant hogweed as its sap can have a burning effect on naked skin, if this happens, wash the sap off as soon as possible and seek further medical advice.



Photo: Giant hogweed

Whichever method you decide to use, you need to be aware that this plant is on **The Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981** (as amended) and lists it on Schedule 9, Section 14, meaning it is an offence to cause giant hogweed to grow in the wild in England and Wales (similar legislation applies in Scotland and Northern Ireland). Also, it can be the subject of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders where occupiers of giant hogweed infested ground can be required to remove the weed or face penalties. Local Authorities have powers under certain circumstances to require the removal of giant hogweed at the earliest opportunity.

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