

Topic: Hazards of Giant Hogweed and Cow Parsnip

Municipal staff will often be called upon to cut down or control Giant Hogweed or Cow Parsnip, invasive plants which pose significant health risks to workers.

Identification



**COW
PARSNIP**

Leaves are NOT shiny, are broader and less serrated than Giant Hogweed.

**GIANT
HOGWEED**



Leaves are shiny and large, with leaf edges very coarse and serrated, like a jagged saw edge.

Cow Parsnip blooms in July. Flowerheads are much smaller than Giant Hogweed, with a diameter of only 20cm. It has 15 to 30 ray flowers per stem.

Giant Hogweed blooms in mid-August. Flowerheads form a large umbrella shape, and grow to 1.5m in diameter. It has more than 50 ray flowers per stem. Giant Hogweed grows up to 5m in height.

What is the danger?

The sap of Giant Hogweed and Cow Parsnip contain toxins that cause severe dermatitis when in contact with skin in the presence of sunlight. This is known as a photo-toxic reaction.

Effects may include welts, rashes and blistering, followed by pigmented scarring that may persist for as long as six years.

Even if the initial exposure is on a cloudy day, the photo-toxic reaction may take place up to two days later if not properly washed off the skin. Giant Hogweed causes a much more severe reaction than Cow Parsnip.



While the blisters will eventually heal, the purple scars left behind may last a lifetime. If sap from Giant Hogweed gets in the eyes, it could lead to permanent blindness.

Control of invasive plants:

Prevent seed development and you will keep the plants isolated to their original location.

It is recommended you do NOT try to remove the plants in the summer. They are much too large and sappy at this time of year. In summer, simply cut off any developing flowers, which will prevent the plant from producing any additional seeds.

From May to June you may use a sharp spade to cut the shoots from the root about 3-4 inches below ground level. The plants will not regenerate from the roots left behind.

During any attempts at plant removal, make sure you have no exposed skin.

Personal protective equipment includes:

- Disposable coveralls, taped at the wrist
- Impervious gloves (i.e. rubber)
- Safety goggles
- Face shield
- Hard hat

It is a good idea to shower thoroughly immediately following the removal activity.