

DEC advises residents on toxic giant hogweed

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There is a warning out from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. They want residents to be on the lookout for giant hogweed.

It looks like a weed, but it is not just a nuisance. It can cause serious health issues for anyone who comes in contact with it. Even if you have had it taken out before, hogweed doesn't go away easily.

Giant hogweed resembles an enormous parsley plant, but it is very dangerous and can cause permanent damage to your skin and eyes. DEC officials say its sap, combined with moisture and sunlight, can cause severe skin and eye irritation, painful blistering, permanent scarring and blindness.

University of Rochester Dermatologist Dr. Mary Gail Mercurio says the side effects are serious.

Dr. Mercurio said, "There is no antidote or a way to undo the exposure."

Giant hogweed can grow to about 14 feet tall. It has a hollow, ridged stem with dark reddish purple blotches. Its leaves can grow to about five feet wide and it has white flower heads that look similar to Queen Ann's lace.

Sandy Auer, of Spencerport says she has been dealing with giant hogweed on her property in Spencerport for years.

Auer said, "There was probably at least ten of the six foot tall ones all lining our driveway up by the road. I'm just really grateful that we didn't touch them before we figured out what they were."

If you come into contact with the invasive plant, you should immediately wash with soap and water and keep out of the sun for at least 48 hours. You will also want to drain any blisters to prevent infection.

Dr. Mercurio said, "Usually you go from a blister to a sore that heals very slowly. You can be left with a dark spot on the skin, what we refer to as hyper-pigmentation and that can take months to resolve and that's often very bothersome to individuals. It's often unsightly."

If you think you have giant hogweed on your property, the DEC wants you to take pictures of it and email it to them. The email is ghogweed@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

More than 800 properties have had their giant hogweed plants controlled by DEC.



Photo: DEC.NY.GOV

