



# BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681ext.6  
<https://www.bonnercountyid.gov/noxious-weeds>

## Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl, *Bonner County Weeds Manager*

Quick on the heels of the holiday issue, I'm going to mix it up a little with this one. Occasionally, we will receive reports of certain noxious weeds that end up to be look-a-likes. That is actually a very good thing! Shows me that people are keeping an eye on what's out there and reporting something that seems suspect. I have had reports of Leafy Spurge that turned out to be a mustard (just one example). I would rather investigate a suspect infestation and have it turn out to be nothing to worry about, as opposed to having a potentially big issue go undetected/unreported.

The co-Weed of the Month is **Giant Hogweed** (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and **Cow Parsnip** (*Heracleum lanatum*). Giant Hogweed is an Idaho listed noxious weed, originating from southwestern Asia, and Cow Parsnip is a native of North America. Giant Hogweed's presence has actually not been confirmed anywhere in Idaho, yet. There are small populations of it in western Washington and northwestern Oregon, so it wouldn't be a stretch to say that northern Idaho could be vulnerable to its sudden appearance. Cow Parsnip is quite common in our area—wet riparian-type habitats as well as disturbed sites are the primary areas that it calls home.

Giant Hogweed and Cow Parsnip same or similar characteristics: Herbaceous perennial with fleshy taproot, deeply divided-compound leaves and flat-topped umbel flower clusters containing numerous white to cream colored flowers. Both start as hearty rosettes and usually bolts/flowers in the second or third year, and both have hairy, hollowed stems.

Cow Parsnip specific characteristics: Grows 2 – 8 feet tall and leaves span about 6 – 10 inches across.

Giant Hogweed specific characteristics: Stems have reddish-purple spots, grows 8 – 16 feet tall and leaves span about 3 – 5 feet across. Yep, that's feet, not inches.

As you can see, the primary physical characteristics separating these two species, are size. Giant Hogweed is basically the “Andre the Giant” of the weeds world. If Giant Hogweed were to show up in Idaho, the state Agriculture Department would mobilize the appropriate resources to treat and eradicate the infestation right away, being that it would automatically classify as a state EDRR (early detection, rapid response) noxious weed.



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Given a chance to develop, Giant Hogweed will create large stands with a dense, towering canopy. This crowds out nearly all understory vegetation, which decreases biodiversity and increases the likelihood for streambank erosion [in the cases of infestations on riparian sites]. Additionally, there is a public health issue surrounding Giant Hogweed; skin contact with the sap causes photosensitizing dermatitis (severe chemically induced sunburn) on people and pets.

With as similar as Cow Parsnip is in some ways (same genus-different species & same physical attributes on a smaller scale) to Giant Hogweed, it is very different in others. Not only is Cow Parsnip a native to North America, it is actually listed as a threatened plant in the state of Tennessee, and an endangered plant in the state of Kentucky, according to the USDA plants database. A juxtaposition to its Asian cousin that happens to be a very concerning threat to the ecological landscape in North America.

Revisiting the fundamental definition of a weed; a weed is any plant, native or not native, growing where it is interfering with your personal management objectives. In most cases, Cow Parsnip does not cause a problem. If it happens to be in an area where you do not want it, control is not very difficult to achieve. While its sap has nowhere near the photosensitizing dermatitis inducing levels that Giant Hogweed has, it does have a minor amount—so you probably wouldn't want it growing in an area where young children play. It would also be undesirable in a garden or a landscape feature. From an herbicide standpoint, Triclopyr (Vastlan®, etc.) products are documented to do well. If near a garden or other sensitive site, Glyphosate products can provide some control. If going the mechanical route of control, dig up the entire plant and the top of the taproot. The main mechanism of spread is by seed, but the root crown also regenerates new shoots.

Please report Giant Hogweed right away, should Bonner County ever have the misfortune of this vegetative devil gracing us with its presence. The smaller family member that belongs here is hopefully not too difficult to distinguish from the exotic beast. See exhibits A & B.