

KC Weed News – March 2010

King County, Washington

(<http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/animalsAndPlants/noxious-weeds/weed-news.aspx>)

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Weed of the Month: [Giant Hogweed](#) (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), [Class A Noxious Weed](#) in King County, Washington

Our Weed of the Month is one of the more well known of Washington's [Class A noxious weeds](#), if only because it is so huge and causes such nasty blisters if your skin comes in contact with its juices. Not only is this plant on Washington's noxious weed and quarantine lists, giant hogweed is also one of only a few invasive plants on the [Federal noxious weed list](#). This means even USDA-APHIS is working to keep this plant out, and nurseries no longer offer this plant for sale anywhere in the country (or they shouldn't!). If you aren't already familiar with giant hogweed, there is a wealth of information online, including our [website](#) and others from as far afield as [New York](#), [Ohio](#) and [Pennsylvania](#), places that share our misery with this plant.

Basically, we are talking about a 15 foot tall perennial with huge, jagged-edged leaves, stout purple-blotched hollow stems, and a two foot wide inflorescence made up of many densely-packed umbrella-like clusters of little white flowers. It can be easy to confuse giant hogweed with its native cousin [cow parsnip](#), especially when young, but cow parsnip rarely gets over 6 or 7 feet tall and is generally less formidable-looking overall. Cow parsnip is very common on the coast and in the mountains, but not very common in the cities around Puget Sound. If you have any trouble distinguishing these plants, just give us a call. We have gotten very good at telling them apart over the years!

Another plant often confused with giant hogweed is [poison-hemlock](#). Both plants start as clumps of large leaves and then form a tall, central, purple-blotched stem. However, poison-hemlock leaves are finely-divided like parsley and the flowers are in loosely arranged small clusters all over the upper stems, not in a densely-packed, central structure like hogweed. Also, poison-hemlock is very common in King County, unlike giant hogweed, and its control is not required (but definitely recommended).

The noxious weed program has been on the lookout for giant hogweed in King County since 1996. Because this is a Class A noxious weed (and a nasty plant to boot), our goal is to eradicate it. This is a challenging thing to do with any weed, and in this case, we inherited a

legacy of giant hogweed being planted in Seattle area gardens for several decades at least, and then escaping and seeding into many alleys, parks, ravines, roadsides, abandoned lots and neighboring yards. Indeed, in the first year of the program, we found 116 properties and roadsides with giant hogweed. Since then, with a few more staff on the job, and help from other people reporting sites, we have discovered hundreds of more sites scattered around Seattle and other cities in the county. Given that it is only one of 50 regulated noxious weeds in King County that we have to keep under control, we were faced with a huge (some would say “giant”) challenge if we were going to eradicate all of the giant hogweed in the county.

So, what did we do? Each year, weed specialists have checked known locations and surveyed their regions for new populations, working with each landowner to make sure all the hogweed that we found was controlled. Keeping it from seeding was always the first priority, but the goal was eradication. Landowners or program staff dug up or chemically treated all hogweed plants found. Then, the same area was checked each following year until there had been no hogweed plants seen for three years in a row. Only then was the site marked “dormant” and flagged for a recheck in three more years. If there still was no hogweed after three more years, we might finally mark that site “closed”. However, if we were at all suspicious that hogweed would come back in the future, we kept it marked dormant and continued checking it every three years until we were confident the hogweed wasn’t coming back. We take eradication very seriously!

What has all this hard work bought us? First, we have contained giant hogweed in King County to the point where we rarely find new flowering plants, and even more rarely find plants in seed. Although we still find new sites (from people reporting them or our own staff finding them), the number of new sites found each year keeps going down. From a peak of 198 new sites found in 1999, there were only 33 new sites found last year. Even better news is that, of all the 1,698 sites we have found since 1996, only 34% are still active. The picture is even more promising if we just look at the sites where hogweed was present when our staff surveyed them (sometimes property owners control the hogweed before we get there, which is great!). In 2009, only 202 out of 816 sites had hogweed when our staff visited them, and 33 of those were new discoveries. We believe we have finally turned the corner on this noxious weed and can breathe a (tentative) sigh of relief.

However, as you know, noxious weeds have a way of sticking around and coming back to bite you when you look the other way. Although we will keep up the pressure and the search for giant hogweed, we need everyone’s help in watching for this plant. If you see any giant hogweed in King County, we urge you to report it to us right away. The last few infestations of a noxious weed are the hardest to find, so we need all the help we can get. Please visit our [website](#) for more information, check our [online map](#) to see where we have found giant hogweed, and report giant hogweed locations [online](#) or by contacting us at 206-296-0290.

Weed Tips for March

It’s garlic mustard time. [Garlic mustard](#) rosettes have been waiting all winter for their March growth spurt and will be flowering before you know it. If you had garlic mustard last year, go back to the same places and look for rosettes now to plan how to control them. Be sure to [contact our program](#) if you find any new populations of garlic mustard or if you would like help planning your control work for the year!

Check pastures for toxic weeds. Animals will be more likely to graze poisonous plants if the grasses are still too short or sparse, so check fields before setting animals out. Look for rosettes of [tansy ragwort](#), [milk thistle](#), and [poison-hemlock](#) and control them before letting the animals graze. For information on other poisonous pasture plants, contact your local extension office or

conservation district. A handy summary of poisonous plants in western Washington can be found on our [brochures page](#).

It's another great month to pull Scotch broom. The weather is mild and the soil is still nice and moist, making weed pulling easier than in the heat of the summer. [Scotch broom](#) starts flowering this month, but there's plenty of time to pull it before the seed pods form in July or August. If you are in King County, we have [weed wrenches](#) you can borrow, but they get pretty popular this time of year. Call us at 206-296-0290 to reserve one and then come down to [our office](#) by the Seattle train station to pick it up. If you haven't used a weed wrench before, don't worry, it's easy to learn how.

Look for [gorse](#), starting to flower later this month. Keep your eyes out for large, spiny bushes with yellow Scotch broom like flowers clustered on the spiny green stems. Did I mention that gorse has big spines? They are hard to miss and painful to experience. We only know of a few locations of gorse in King County but there may be more lurking in the woods or along the shorelines of Puget Sound. Pulling or digging up this plant is possible while the soil is loose, but you may need a [weed wrench](#) or similar tool and make sure to wear rugged clothes and heavy duty gloves.

Watch out for birds in blackberry thickets. If you are looking for a good reason to procrastinate your blackberry removal, you can say "it's for the birds". Many birds are starting to nest this month and blackberry thickets are a popular place for some bird species. For areas that provide important bird habitat (especially where there are few alternatives near by), the Green Seattle Partnership makes the very good recommendation that you consider refraining from large blackberry removal projects during the nesting season (mid-March to the end of June). If you are removing blackberries this time of year, consider removing only about a quarter of the infestation at a time. This gives the birds time to find other options.

Look for rosettes where you controlled weeds last year. March is a good time to look for low-growing rosettes of biennial and perennial weeds, while grass and other plants are still short. Some of the weeds to check for this month or in early April include [garlic mustard](#), [milk thistle](#), [tansy ragwort](#), [bull thistle](#), [poison-hemlock](#), [giant hogweed](#), and [spotted](#) and [diffuse knapweed](#). Use a trowel or fork tool to loosen the soil and dig up isolated plants or, if there is too much to control manually, consider whether it might be more cost-effective to spray larger infestations, if the site is appropriate for herbicide use. Younger plants are more susceptible and lower rates can be used to reduce overall herbicide use. Please [contact us](#) for more information specific to your site and weed.

Sign up Now for Noxious Weed Workshops

We are taking registrations for our annual noxious weed workshops for vegetation management personnel, landscapers, and others working on noxious weed control. Session dates are May 5 and May 12, with a third session open to King County staff on May 26. Each session will cover different topics related to noxious weed identification and control. More information is available on our [website](#).

All classes are free and open to the public but space is limited. WSDA pesticide license recertification credits will be available (4 credits requested for each class). Register at 206-263-6468 or sasha.shaw@kingcounty.gov. Please provide the name(s), agency or company, phone number and email, and which session(s) you are requesting.

South Session: Wednesday, **May 5**, 8 am to 12 pm, [Kent Memorial Park Building](#), 850 N. Central, Kent, WA 98032

North Session: Wednesday, **May 12**, 8 am to 12 pm, [Northshore Utility District](#), Northshore Room, 6830 NE 185th St., Kenmore, WA 98028,

King County Staff Session: Wednesday, May 26, 8am to 12 pm, [Preston Community Center](#), Preston, WA 98027

Where to Find our Weed Info Booth this Spring

You will be able to ask weed questions in person, check out live weed specimens, and pick up fact sheets and booklets at the following locations in March, April and May (check out our [complete schedule](#) online and if you have a community event that could use a booth on invasive and noxious weeds, please [contact us](#)):

- March 28, [Middle Green River Coalition's Rock the Green Clean Fundraiser](#)
- April 10, Lake Forest Park Green Fair, 10am-2pm, Third Place Commons
- April 17, Shoreline Natural Yard Care Fair, 9am-3pm, Central Market, Shoreline
- April 17, [Stillwater Wildlife Refuge Earth Day Event](#)
- April 22, King County Earth Day Expo, 10am-2pm, Westlake Center, Seattle
- April 23-25, [Enumclaw's Spring Expo](#), Enumclaw Fairgrounds, Enumclaw
- May 1, [Vashon Farmers Market](#), 10am-2pm, Vashon Island
- May 8, [Tukwila Backyard Wildlife Festival](#), 9am-2pm, Tukwila Community Center, Tukwila
- May 15, [Issaquah Farmers Market](#), 9am-2pm, Pickering Barn, Issaquah

Aquatic Plant Conference Coming to Seattle

The [Western Aquatic Plant Management Society's 29th annual meeting](#) will be held in Seattle, Washington, from March 28 to March 31, 2010 at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel (1400 Sixth Avenue, Seattle, WA 98101). A preview of the program is online at http://www.wapms.org/conference/2010_wapms_program_draft.pdf. The program includes permit updates, reports from the western states, legislative updates, information on emerging aquatic weeds, aquatic weed control information, and much, much more. Registration is free for students and \$175 for others as of March 1.

Oregon Leads the Way by Banning Sale of English Ivy and Butterfly Bush

In February, the [Oregon Department of Agriculture](#) announced a ban on the sale, transport and propagation of [English ivy](#) and [butterfly bush](#). Starting in June 1 for English ivy (*Hedera helix* and *H. hibernica*) and immediately for non-sterile varieties of butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*), nurseries and garden stores won't be able to sell these widely used ornamentals, except for stock on hand. Once that runs out, there should be no more intentional introductions of these species in Oregon. This ban didn't come quickly or without debate and has been phased in over several years, but it did finally happen. This is a big relief for Oregon community groups and public agencies working to remove these invasive species from parks, forests, and rivers in the western part of the state.

Those of us concerned about the impact of these species in Washington wonder if our state will follow Oregon's lead. It doesn't appear likely, according to a recent news story on [KUOW radio](#). In that story, Tom Wessel, manager with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), is quoted as saying, "We consider a quarantined species as a species that doesn't occur here, or if it does occur, it's not widely distributed and it's being officially controlled. If it's widely distributed, it's generally too late." The article reported that Wessel says that our state's quarantine law is "meant to keep invasive plants out of areas where they don't already exist". In

the same article, Bill Brookreson, former Deputy Director of WSDA and President of the [Pacific Northwest Invasive Plant Council](#), comes back with a strong rebuttal of the current WSDA position. Brookreson is quoted as saying: "It makes no sense from a standpoint of public policy to allow its continued sale. It's like having a flooding sink and bailing it out but never turning the water off." I couldn't have said it better.

Mexico Passes Comprehensive Invasive Species Law

The Mexican legislature passed a new law covering many aspects of the invasive species problem in Mexico. According to a posting on the Aliens list serve, re-posted on the [Bugwood Blog](#), the new law defines an exotic invasive species and prohibits the importation of exotic invasive species or any other wild species that can carry an exotic invasive species, prohibits the release into the wild of exotic invasive species, mandates the creation of a list of exotic invasive species that has to be reviewed every 3 years, mandates the creation of a regulation on prevention of entry of these species, management, control and eradication of those exotic invasives which are already established in Mexico, and gives the Economy Ministry the power to control transit of these species inside Mexico. This is a promising development. We often talk about invasive species not paying attention to political boundaries. If Mexico and other nations near us manage invasive species effectively, this will benefit us as well.

Public Invited to Comment on King County's Stormwater Management Program

King County residents are encouraged to learn more about annual updates to the county's stormwater management program and provide feedback on local stormwater management practices in unincorporated King County through the new online public involvement process. This effort is part of King County's ongoing commitment to protect public health and improve environmental conditions in our local streams, rivers, lakes and Puget Sound. Stormwater is one of the significant sources of pollution of our nation's waters. The Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) has identified stormwater as the most significant contributor to reduced water quality in Puget Sound, which is targeted for clean up by the Puget Sound Partnership.

As part of the Puget Sound clean-up strategy, The Washington State Department of Ecology used its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting authority to issue strict stormwater permits to municipalities. King County has developed a Stormwater management program to meet the requirements of the stormwater permit. The program is reviewed and updated annually, which provides the public with an ongoing opportunity to review and comment on the program's development and implementation.

Public comments will be accepted through March 12. The [2010 Draft King County Stormwater Management Program Document](#) is available for public review. For more information and instructions on how to submit comments, please see the county website: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/wlr/stormwater-services/stormwater-program/public-review.aspx> or contact the Stormwater Program at stormwater@kingcounty.gov or through the U.S. mail to the Stormwater Management Team, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, 201 S. Jackson St., Suite 600, Seattle, WA 98104. Presentations on the Stormwater Management Program to interested groups are available by request, please email stormwater@kingcounty.gov.

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Please feel free to distribute this information freely and to contact me if you have any questions. If you do not wish to receive KC Weed News in the future or know someone who does, please drop me an email and I'll update the mailing list.

Thank you.