

Officials: Most hogweed sightings are false

Officials received multiple, erroneous sightings

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Wisconsin Emergency Management officials tell TODAY'S TMJ4 they have been receiving several calls over the past few days from concerned Ozaukee and Sheboygan County residents over potential sighting of a dangerous plant that can have serious health implications. However, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officials say the sightings are not confirmed and in most cases were lookalikes.

"Don't be fooled, giant hogweed has several lookalikes that are much more common," DNR officials said in a written statement.

"Each report (other than the treated population in the City of Sheboygan) has been false to-date," officials added.

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Michigan officials say the lookalikes can include pokeweed and giant ragweed. In just one month, Michigan officials received reports of 250 sightings of giant hogweed. However, only five of the 250 were actually giant hogweed, the rest were lookalikes. That's only two percent that had positive identification.

Meanwhile in Wisconsin, DNR officials say the most common look-alike plants are cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) and angelica (*Angelica atropurpurea*).

"Both are common native plants that are much smaller than hogweed and have some distinctive features," DNR officials said.

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Cow parsnip stems are narrower and mostly green, without raised dots. They range in height from four to nine feet, with smaller flower clusters that are six to 12 inches across, officials

said, noting that leaves are less sharply lobed and only grow to about 12 inches across.

However, the stems on angelica are light purple throughout and smooth, and the flower clusters form a sphere.

"Native elderberry shrubs (*Sambucus canadensis*) can also fool residents as can non-native and invasive Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) and wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*)," officials added.

According to the [National Institutes of Health](#), pokeweed is most dangerous when eaten, and ragweed is a common allergen for those who suffer from seasonal allergies.

Direct contact with giant hogweed, can cause temporary blindness, severe skin burns, and blisters, government officials say.

If you think you see giant hogweed on your property, Michigan State University officials say the first step is to positively identify the plant. This can be done by online research, taking good quality digital photographs, and [emailing the pictures here](#) .

If you're exposed to the sap, here's what you need to do.

First, cover the exposed area and get out of the sun.

Be sure to keep your hands away from your face and eyes.

Once indoors, wash the sap off using soap and water.

Keep the exposed area covered after washing, and away from exposure to the sun.

The sun's ultraviolet rays are what trigger the release of the dangerous toxin.

Seek medical attention, if necessary.

Michigan officials note that using mowers and weed-wackers will actually spread the toxins. Application of proper chemicals is one way to kill the plant.

Wisconsin Department of Resource officials said that the plant can also be burned. But first, residents must check with their local community to see if burning is allowed, and also obtain a [free DNR burning permit](#).

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