

# Giant hogweed and serious health issues

By ALEXANDER HARMLE  
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Giant hogweed, also known as giant cow parsley, is not usually thought of as an environmental concern. Some see it simply as a beautiful plant with gorgeous blooms.

This perennial plant, however, is considered a noxious weed that has become a thorn in the side of European and North American authorities in recent years. It has grown rapidly and has overrun many areas. "Giant hogweed is a public health hazard that ranks even higher than poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac, in respect to its potential to harm humans," the U.S. Department of Agriculture states on its Web site.

The warning continues: "The sap from this plant can cause a severe skin reaction known as photodermatitis or photosensitivity. The reaction can occur up to 48 hours after contact. After coming into contact with the sap, the skin blisters when exposed to sunlight. Contact with the eyes can lead to temporary or even permanent blindness."

This plant is detrimental to the health of humans and animals, and is regarded from an ecological perspective as a serious problem. As of 2009, the weed has taken root all over Hamburg, Germany. The Hamburg government is waging a complex war against this transplanted intruder, which is a native of the Caucasus.

Eimsbuettel, a Hamburg suburb, has implemented a new strategy in its fight against giant hogweed. Instead of cutting down the weed before it blooms, as is practiced in other suburbs and in the area of Hamburg proper, Eimsbuettel has initiated

a pilot project. This suburb's local government has sent out crews to dig up the weed. It will continue to do so over the next seven years, or cover the plant with a weed blocker. Since the seeds of this plant can survive for up to seven years, the blocker has to remain in place for that long.

"Digging up the giant hogweed is without a doubt the most effective tool against this plant. It blocks the plant from further propagation," said Helge Masch, head of the Special Botanical Garden of Wandsbek. Cutting the weeds down is not effective, and he is very critical of such an approach, which would require that the plants be cut down every year for up to four years, and several times during the year, as the plant grows a penury bloom once cut down.

Sabine Meindl, the representative for the giant hogweed action group in Eimsbuettel, explained that local governments contact the owners of gardens in the area where the weed has been spotted. The plant is actively pursued on public domain. However, when found on private property, owners can only be advised to eradicate the weed. They cannot be forced to do so.

"The problem we encounter is that we proactively fight the plant on public property and once we turn around, it stares back at us from private properties. This plant is blooming, sending its seeds onto public grounds the minute the wind picks up. This undermines our efforts of fighting the plant on public domain," Meindl said.

"The plant should be destroyed on private ground as well, and we have to notify the owners about this matter. But unfortunately, there is no a law that forces the owners to

remove the plant in Germany."

#### NOTES ABOUT THE PLANT

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) was originally found in Central Asia's Caucasus region. It was brought to Europe as a botanical curiosity in the 19th century, and to the United States in the early 1900s. Unfortunately, it has spread rapidly and widely. It can grow to a height of 15 to 20 feet.

The blooms appear in the form of a white, umbrella-like cluster, usually appearing between July and September. The plant belongs to the Apiaceae family, and is related to the carrot and parsley family. It resembles common hogweed.

In Hamburg, the plant can be found as an ornamental plant in gardens, or growing wild along train tracks or near small brooks or rivers. In the United States, it can be found in many states, especially in the Pacific Northwest, some states in the Midwest, the South, and the Northeast.

It can take up to seven years to eradicate this plant, which is quite prolific and can grow large colonies of plants from one single plant.

This plant is included in the "Federal Noxious Weed List." It is illegal to transport it across state lines. Those who do so are subject to stiff fines.

Anyone finding the plant in the United States should notify their State Department of Agriculture for assistance in eradicating this pest. Several states have giant hogweed hotlines: Mich. (800) 292-3939, N. Y. state (800) 554-4501 extension 58760, Mass. (617) 626-1779, and Pa. (877) 464-9333.



PERNICIOUS PLANT: Giant hogweed, a toxic, invasive weed, has been shown to cause serious health problems, including photo sensitivity and contact dermatitis. If the juice gets in one's eyes, it can cause blindness. The man holding the plant is protecting himself with gloves. Hogweed flowers can be seen in the background. (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/us/) THOMAS B. DENHOLM, NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, BUGWOOD.ORG

## Sleep well with Chinese medicine



ROSE RELIEF: Rose petals can be used to relieve stress. FREEFOTO.COM

By China Research Group  
Epoch Times Staff

Chinese medicine has a variety of methods for helping people get a good night's sleep. When suffering from insomnia or other sleep problems, these methods are also useful. As long as you sleep well, you'll be able to maintain a charming disposition and a good complexion.

#### ROSE TO RELEASE STRESS

The nature of rose is "cold." It can alleviate discomfort in the liver caused by too much pressure and can also relieve depression.

Rose tea: Use five or six rose petals to make tea. The best time to drink is during the day, when feeling the pressures of life.

#### LOTUS SEEDS CLEANSE THE HEART

Lotus seeds taste sweet, and their nature is neutral. They're also suitable for

anybody, and can be helpful for relaxing the heart. When the weather is hot and it's difficult to sleep at night, lotus seed can get rid of the heat and calm the heart.

You can use 1/2 ounce to 3/4 ounce of lotus seeds to make a sweet soup, which is very suitable for summer drinking!

#### LILY DRIVES AWAY BOREDOM

Lily tastes bitter and sweet—its nature is a little cold—and it has the effect of freshening the lungs. When you feel depression and boredom, it can help you fall asleep easily.

Lily soup: When stewing a soup, one can add 1/2 ounce to 3/4 ounce of lilies. Fresh lilies can also be fried with a little salt, which is very delicious.

Dr. Benjamin Kong from Sweden and Dr. Xiu Zhou from Germany are the principal editors of the China Research Group.

## Agricultural fungicides

By PETER SANFTMAN  
Epoch Times Staff

Is there a connection between the grapes on your plate and fungus infections?

Professor Frank-Michael Mueller from the Center for Children's and Youth Medicine in Heidelberg, Germany, discovered a disconcerting connection between antifungal chemicals found in grapes and fungal infections found in humans.

Certain fungi are so resistant to treatment that they, just like bacteria, can replicate inside the human body and lead to serious illnesses that almost defy treatment.

People blessed with good immune systems are able to kill fungi that invade the body, but for people who suffer from cancer or AIDS—those with weakened immune systems—such fungal invasions pose a serious threat. Fewer and fewer people are responding to antifungal medication. "Certain fungi take advantage of a weakened immune system. ... The resulting symptoms mask infections that one finds with bacteria or viruses. Infections from yeast or mould are the most difficult to treat, especially the latter," professor Mueller explained.

"Overuse of toxic antifungal preparations in agriculture, especially

those of the azole group, poses a high ... risk for humans, resulting in the development and transfer of these fungal illnesses and their resistance to treatment, ..." he said.

Chemical fungicides on plants lead to fungi in humans, which are immune to medical treatment. Swabs taken from the mouths of several HIV-positive patients afflicted with a fungal disease were tested to determine which treatment, using substances from the azole group, would kill the fungus. To their surprise, they found that various fungi are no longer eliminated with this medication.

The research team did additional studies and made a discovery. The fungus phyla from the above-cited patients are the same ones that resist treatment in agriculture.

Once a fungus has been treated with a fungicide over a long period of time, most fungi die. But a few fungi develop immunity to these toxic substances.

Modern agricultural practices have ramifications for patients who have become severely ill with fungal infections. This has prompted the current emphasis on a good diet and a well-balanced lifestyle. By consuming well-washed organic products, one's consumption of toxic antifungal substances can be greatly reduced.

## Sun suggestions from the Skin Cancer Foundation

By DR. JOHN BRIFFA

I was interested to read a report recently regarding a recommendation coming out of the Skin Cancer Foundation in the United States. The foundation has recommended that adults increase their intake of vitamin D from 400 IU (the recommended daily amount) to 1,000 IU.

This is good news because there's abundant evidence that vitamin D deficiency is common. Such a deficiency here may increase the risk of many ailments including cardiovascular disease, bone disease, multiple sclerosis, and different forms of cancer.

Upping our intake of vitamin D could well help to protect against these conditions and will almost certainly improve general health and well-being.

The Skin Cancer Foundation has made a useful recommendation, but some could argue that this organization is, to some degree, responsible for the fact that vitamin deficiency is so common.

The organization recommends, not surprisingly, that we be wary of the sun, and that we all use sunscreen of at least sun protection factor (SPF) 15.

From the Foundation's Web site: "since its inception in 1979, The Skin Cancer Foundation has always recommended using a sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher as one important part of a complete sun protection regimen. Sunscreen alone is not enough, however. Read our full list of skin cancer prevention tips:

- Seek the shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Do not burn.
- Avoid tanning and UV tanning booths.
- Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher every day.
- Apply 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) of sunscreen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside. Reapply every two hours.
- Cover up with clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses."

While there is some justification for this advice, it is obviously skin-focused. And what this sort of advice can neglect are the profound benefits sunlight exposure can have on general health.

While The Skin Cancer Foundation is clearly aware of the fact that vitamin D is important, it recommends that we get this through diet and supplements. The likelihood is that these recommendations will still leave many individuals short on vitamin D, especially in the winter.

While I am not against supplementation (I am currently taking 3,000 IU of vitamin D again myself), I suspect that shying away from the sun and slaving ourselves in sunscreen will almost certainly jeopardize our chances of enjoying optimal levels of vitamin D.

And the risk here is that what might be good for our skin, may have profound negative consequences for other aspects of our health.

Early in 2008, I reported on a study that weighed the pros and cons of sun

exposure regarding cancer risk. This study estimated that for each life saved as a result of reduced sunlight exposure (and reduced risk of melanoma), about 10 other lives would be lost as a result of an increased risk of other forms of cancer.

The authors of this study suggested, "Increased sun exposure may lead to improved cancer prognosis and, [it's] possible, give more positive than adverse effects on health."

On top of this, we need to remember that vitamin D and sunlight exposure have been linked with reduced risk of many other conditions, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Overall, while I welcome The Skin Cancer Foundation's call for increased vitamin D intake, I also believe that the advice it gives regarding sun exposure is likely to be doing more harm than good.

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## How bras killed two young women

By W. GIFFORD-JONES, M.D.

What measures one inch in diameter and kills more people than hurricanes and tornadoes combined in the United States, is 50,000 times hotter than the sun, and strikes this planet 3.6 million times every year?

No doubt you have the answer—lightning. But you may not know there's less chance of dying from this underrated killer if you remember the "30 second rule"—and how a bra killed two English women.

Lightning packs a huge punch when it strikes. If you're unlucky to be the victim, 100,000,000 to 300,000,000 volts will pass through your body with instant and deadly consequences.

On July 10, 1926, lightning exploded a navy ammunition depot in Mount Hope, New Jersey, killing 19 people. The cost to rebuild the facility was \$81 million.

In May 1937, lightning struck the German airship Hindenburg and 36 passengers perished.

In December 1963, a Pan Am 707 crashed in flames when lightning hit the jet's fuel tank killing 81 passengers.

One of the most bizarre lightning deaths occurred in London, England. Two women were killed instantly when 100,000,000 volts struck their underwired bras.

Lightning kills four times as many men as women. But it's not due to male testosterone. Over the years, men have simply been involved in more outdoor sports from May to September.

Some people luckily escape death when lightning strikes them. Lee Trevino, the exuberant golfer never at a loss for words, was struck by lightning during a gold tournament. He later remarked, "It completely lifted me off the ground. I couldn't breathe. I thought by all rights they should be putting me in the ground at 10 a.m. Monday morning."

If lightning doesn't kill, it can leave victims



LIGHTNING DEMO: A dummy holding a golf club over his head is struck by 2 million volts of lightning during a display at Melbourne's Scienceworks Museum. WILLIAM WEST/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

with major injuries to vital organs. Some people have extensive burns. Others develop cardiac irregularities and neurological problems, such as seizures and amnesia. Still more are left with ruptured eardrums, cataracts, kidney problems, and impotence. A lightning strike can affect any organ of the body, often with lasting consequences.

Can you decrease your risk of dying from lightning? The first rule is: Don't mess around with 100,000,000 volts. You may be having the best round of golf in your life and want to break a record. But if you hear thunder, immediately stop playing and walk back to the clubhouse alone. There's less chance of being "splashed"

if lightning strikes a nearby companion.

Studies show that golfers often make the mistake of standing with a golf club or an umbrella in hand. And be sure to remove metal objects from your hair. A tiny hairpin has been known to increase the risk of being killed by lightning.

If you're boating, it's prudent to head for port. Swimmers should get out of the water. And if you're hiking or playing sports and your hair suddenly stands on end during a storm or your skin tingles, you're about to be struck by lightning. Your only hope is to drop immediately to the ground.

You're supposed to be safe in a car, but several summers ago I was driving on the New York Thruway when lightning struck the road about 20 feet in front of my car. It was the loudest noise I'd ever heard, and the windshield was splattered with tar. Like Lee Trevino, I thought I'd written my final newspaper column. This near miss left me with a tingling sensation on the left side of my body for several days, even though I was inside my car and not directly struck.

The safest place during an electrical storm is in your home, but stay away from open doors, fireplaces, pipes, metal sinks, and telephones. Turn off all appliances and don't use an electric toothbrush or razor. And never take laundry off a metal clothesline.

This summer, more lives can be saved by following this rule: If you can count 30 seconds or less between a lightning flash and the crack of thunder, seek protection immediately.

Then, after the final lightning flash, don't resume playing for another 30 minutes, as many people have been killed by lightning after the storm seems to have ended.

Enjoy this summer safely minus 100,000,000 volts.

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