

### *Heracleum sphondylium*

**HOGWEED** is an annual to perennial. Native to Europe, northern temperate Asia, and western North America, it has small, dull white, greenish-white or pink flowers.

It is also known as Alderdrots, Bear's breech, Bear skeiters, Bee's nest, Beggar-weed, *Bénarde* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Berce* (French), *Berce commune* (French), *Berenklauw* (Dutch), Bilders, Billers, *Björnfloka* (Swedish), *Björnloka* (Swedish), *Bolševnik boršč* (Slovak), *Bolševnik borščový* (Slovak), *Bolševnik obecný* (Czech), Broad kelk, Broadweed, Bullers, Bundweed, Buneweed, Bunnan, Bunnert, Bunnle, Bunwort, Caddell, Caddy, Cadweed, Camlick, Cathaw-blow, Caxlies, Chirk, Clogweed, Cowbelly, Cowbumble, Cow cabbage, Cow-cakes, Cow clogweed, Cowflop, Cow-keeks, Cowkeep, Cow mumble, Cow parsley, Cow parsnip, Cow-weed, Cushia, Devil's oatmeal, Devil's tobacco, Dryland scout, Eltrot, Geagles, Gipsy's lace, Hardheads, Heltrot, Hemlock, Hogbrake weed, Hogweed cowparsnip, Humpy-scrumples, Keck, Kedlock, Kegga, Keglus, Keks, Keksi, Kesh, Kesk, Kewse, Kex, Kirk, Kiskies, Limperscrimp, Limperscrimp, Lisamoo, Lumperscrump, Madnep, Masterwort, Meadow parsnip, *Panace* (Italian), *Panasen y Cawr* (Welsh), Pig's bubble, Pig's cole, Pig's flop, Pig's food, Pig's parsnip, Pigweed, Rabbit's meat, Rabbit's vittles, Rough kex, Scabby hands, Skeets, Snake's meat, Sweet biller, Swineweed, *Tchlaisse* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Ukonputki* (Finnish), *Wiesen-Bärenklau* (German), Wippul-squip, Woolly parsnip, and Youthwort.

Warning – handling the juice, or if taken internally, it can cause blisters and possibly permanent purple pigmentation on the skin in subsequent exposure to sunlight.

*Sphondylium* is derived from Greek component *sphondylo-* (backbone).

Hogweed was dedicated to Heracles who, from Greek mythology, was believed to have introduced the medicinal use of it (or an allied plant) to human beings.

This plant has provided a staple part of diet in Siberia for centuries, and in Russia the young shoots have been prepared for the table like garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*). A type of sugar viewed as a delicacy was extracted from the stems and in some places the stems have also been used to make an alcoholic drink. In Poland a type of beer has been made from the seeds and leaves.

It is popular in many country areas today, particularly in Scandinavia where it is used as both a human foodstuff and fodder for animals, especially pigs.

The stems have provided a tobacco substitute smoked by gypsies.

For the Micmac North American Indian tribe the plant was a source of medicine that according to records seems to have been used for treating some female disorders.

Today young shoots provide a commercial ingredient for some eastern European beers.

Hogweed is also used in some proprietary medicines.

Medicinally, the leaves and root were once employed in the treatment of epilepsy, and the root was also used for treating coughs and jaundice, as well as in the removal of hard skin over abscesses. It is used today in homoeopathic treatments.