

Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb

(*Gunnera manicata*)

MEDIUM RISK

Common Names

Brazilian Giant-rhubarb, Chilean Rhubarb, Giant Rhubarb, Giant Gunnera

Family: Gunneraceae

Status in Ireland

Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb is an Invasive species, listed under the Medium Impact Invasive Species Regulation S.I. 477 (Ireland). It is illegal to plant or cause its spread.

Description / Profile

Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb is a large, herbaceous perennial plant. Despite its common name, it is not related to edible rhubarb. The plant favours acidic to neutral soils and requires consistently moist conditions for optimal growth. While it can tolerate a range of soil types, it is particularly successful in wet, peaty, or loamy soils. This adaptability, combined with its rapid growth, allows it to naturalise and become invasive in suitable habitats, particularly around water bodies and wetland ecosystems.



Size

Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb can reach a height of 2-3 metres.

Leaves - are enormous, typically reaching 2-3 metres across. They are round to kidney-shaped, with deeply lobed edges and a rough, textured surface. Leaves have a coarse, rough surface with prominent veins. The underside is also textured, and both surfaces can have a slightly bristly feel. Petioles are covered with bristly hairs and sometimes reddish-brown spines.



Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb Leaf

Stems/Rhizomes - Consists primarily of thick, fleshy rhizomes rather than a traditional above-ground woody stem. The main stem structure is underground and consists of thick, fleshy rhizomes. Rhizomes have a rough, bumpy surface and grow horizontally forming a central crown from which the leaves and flower spikes emerge.



Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb Stem

Flowers - Flowers are small and greenish-brown, appearing inconspicuous compared to the rest of the plant. They grow densely along tall, conical spikes, giving the flower structure a rough texture. These spikes can reach a height up to 2 metres emerging from the base of the plant near the central crown. The spikes are thick and upright, resembling large, elongated cones.



Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb Flower

Seeds - Tiny, round, and dark brown or reddish-brown in colour. They are contained within small, berry-like fruits that develop along the tall flower spikes. The seeds can be dispersed by water, which is common near ponds, streams, and other wet environments where the plant thrives.



Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb Seed

Rhizomes/Roots - The primary root structure consists of thick, fleshy rhizomes, which are underground stems that grow horizontally. In addition to the thick rhizomes, it has fibrous roots that extend from the rhizomes into the surrounding soil.



Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb Root

N.B. This Species Identification Guide is intended to outline the key identification factors and treatment options only and should not be used as a definitive method for species ID. Legislation and its interpretation is constantly evolving. A variety of other IAPS may be encountered, which may require specific survey and mitigation. Please contact Japanese Knotweed Control Ltd (mail@jkc.ie) for the latest position & advice.

Habitat

Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb thrives in a range of moist and damp habitats, making it well-suited to Ireland's wet climate. It is commonly found in:

- **Gardens and Parks:** Its preference for wet conditions means it is usually found in water gardens or near artificial ponds.
- **Near Water Bodies:** Gravitates towards the edges of ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers, where soil remains consistently moist or waterlogged. The plant can establish itself in these areas and spread along the banks.
- **Wetlands and Boggy Areas:** Thrives in naturally wet habitats such as marshes, bogs, and other waterlogged areas, benefiting from high soil moisture levels.
- **Shaded or Semi-Shaded Areas:** Prefers partial shade to full sun, making it adaptable to various light conditions. It often grows in the shaded areas under large trees or along woodland edges.

Control & Management

Effective management requires a combination of herbicide application, mechanical removal, and careful monitoring, particularly in sensitive or protected areas.

Note: *Herbicide use near watercourses requires special permission from the local council or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).*

Chemical Control

Herbicide treatment (such as our Green Matters™ foam treatment) - is the most effective method, particularly when applied in late summer/early autumn when the plant is storing energy in its roots. If near watercourses, use only aquatic-approved herbicides to prevent contamination and consider cut stem injection technique for a more precise application. Maintain a buffer zone (at least 10 metres) and avoid herbicide run-off.

Growth Stage - Use appropriate herbicide formulations depending on the growth stage, example, in early growth (spring), full height (summer), flowering (late summer), or dying back (autumn/winter).

Mechanical Control

Excavation - mechanical removal can be effective and can be conducted all year round but must be done carefully to ensure all roots are removed.

S.O.S.™ - JKC soil screening service is an option to reduce costs. Screened soils can be re-used on site to minimising materials requiring disposal.

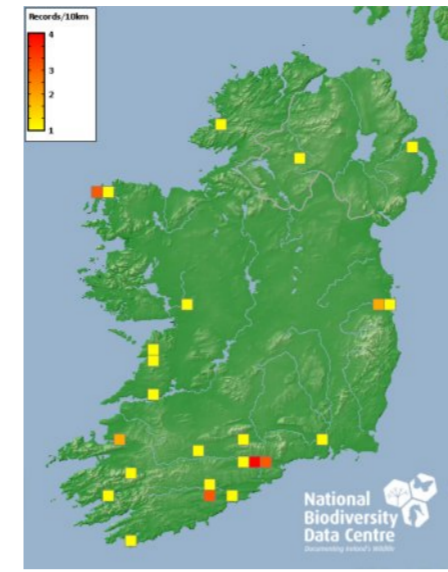
Manual Removal - For small infestations, manual removal of plants, including roots, can be effective. Ensure all root fragments and seeds are removed to prevent regrowth.

Treatment Bund - If there is space on the site, a treatment bund can be considered. Vector material should be placed in a prepared bund that is lined with root barrier and monitored / treated until new growth is completely suppressed.

Root Barriers - Barriers can be installed to prevent the spread of roots into adjacent properties. Installing root barriers can help contain the spread of roots, particularly near infrastructure or sensitive areas.

Herbicide Treatment Timetable for Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb

Month	Treatment	Herbicide Type	Herbicide Rate	Considerations
March - April	Early Growth Stage Treatment	Glyphosate-based herbicide (e.g., Roundup)	5-6 L/ha of 360g/L formulation	Apply when leaves are expanding but before full size.
May - June	Mid-Growth Stage Foliar Application	Glyphosate or Triclopyr (e.g., Garlon 4)	Glyphosate: 6 L/ha; Triclopyr: 5 L/ha	Treat when leaves are fully expanded. Avoid flowering period.
July - August	Cut & Spray Method	Glyphosate	10-15 ml of 360g/L solution per cut leaf	Cut the leaves and apply directly to the cut stems.
September - October	Pre-Senescence Treatment	Glyphosate or Imazapyr (e.g., Arsenal)	Glyphosate: 6-7 L/ha; Imazapyr: 2-3 L/ha	Apply before the plant enters dormancy.
November - February	Physical Removal	N/A	N/A	Remove and properly dispose of rhizomes and leaf bases.



This map shows the current (2024) distribution of Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb in Ireland, recorded by the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

Reporting

Reporting sightings of invasive species in Ireland to the National Biodiversity Data Centre and/or the relevant local authority.

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/start-recording>.

Monitoring and Maintenance

Regular monitoring of the site is essential, particularly after initial treatment or excavation. Plan for follow-up inspections of treated / excavated areas for at least 2-3 years to check for regrowth or new infestations.

Environmental Considerations

Herbicide Handling - Use PPE, including gloves, goggles, and long-sleeved clothing. Avoid skin and eye contact and inhalation. Follow all safety instructions on herbicide labels.

Herbicide Application Method - Use foliar spraying for large infestations and cut stem application or mechanical removal for smaller stands or in sensitive areas. Ensure accurate calibration of spraying equipment to avoid over-application.

Weather Conditions - Apply during calm, dry conditions to minimise drift. Avoid application during heavy rainfall or when rain is forecast within 6 hours to reduce run-off.

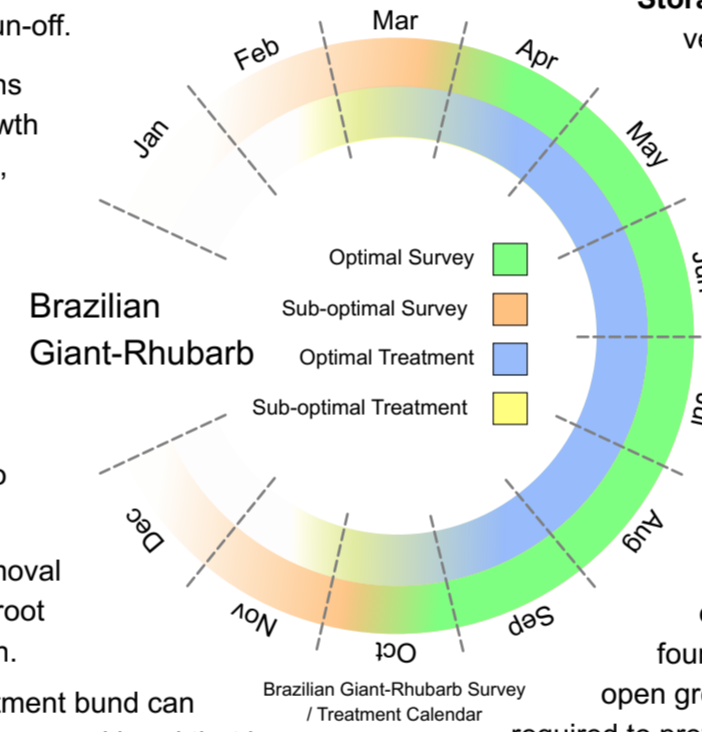
Storage & Disposal - Store herbicides securely in a dry, well-ventilated area away from water sources. Dispose of containers and unused herbicides according to local regulations to prevent environmental contamination.

Watercourses - Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb can spread easily along rivers and streams in Ireland, where water can carry seeds downstream.

Soil Movement - Soil movement or excavation might cause further spread, such as during construction projects.

Proximity to Infrastructure - Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb is often found along riverbanks and drainage ditches, where its seeds can easily be spread by flowing water. This poses risks of further colonisation downstream. Its extensive root system can cause concern for structural foundations if left unmanaged, although it typically prefers moist, open ground. Regular monitoring and maintenance are often required to prevent it from encroaching on infrastructure and to control its invasive potential in sensitive areas like wetlands or water management systems.

Legal Requirements - Gunnera is listed on the Third Schedule of the EU Habitats Regulations which makes it an offence under Regulation 49 to plant, disperse, allow or cause to grow this plant in the Republic of Ireland.. Adhering to invasive species management practices is crucial.



Safety Protocols

Herbicide Handling - Use PPE, including gloves, goggles, face mask and long-sleeved clothing, Coveralls. Avoid skin and eye contact and inhalation.



Follow all safety instructions on herbicide labels. If the infestation is in a public area, signage may be required to warn the public and prevent soil disturbance.

On-site Biosecurity Measures

Prevent Spread - Avoid disturbing the plant unnecessarily, as seeds / root fragments can easily spread and establish new colonies. Remove and bag all cut material for proper disposal.

Equipment Cleanliness - Clean all tools, equipment, footwear, and clothing before leaving the site to prevent the spread of roots and plant material.

Transport of Plant Material - Transport all plant material in sealed containers to an authorised disposal site.

Do not compost or leave on-site, as this can lead to further spread.

Monitoring & Follow-Up - Regular monitoring of the site is essential, particularly after initial treatment or excavation.

Plan for follow-up inspections of treated / excavated areas for at least 2-3 years to check for regrowth or new infestations.

Follow-up treatments may be necessary for several years due to the persistent nature of the root system.

Long-Term Management

Site Rehabilitation - Following successful control, implement a long-term monitoring and rehabilitation plan to restore native vegetation and prevent reinvasion.

Re-vegetation - Replant treated areas with native species to restore ecological balance and prevent re-invasion by Brazilian Giant-Rhubarb.

Community Engagement - Engage local communities in identification and reporting of infestations. Educate on its ecological impacts and promote the use of native alternatives for landscaping.

For further information and free advice, please contact:
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