

Giant Rhubarb

(*Gunnera tinctoria*)



Family name: Gunneraceae (Gunnera family)
Common name/s: Giant Rhubarb, Chilean Rhubarb

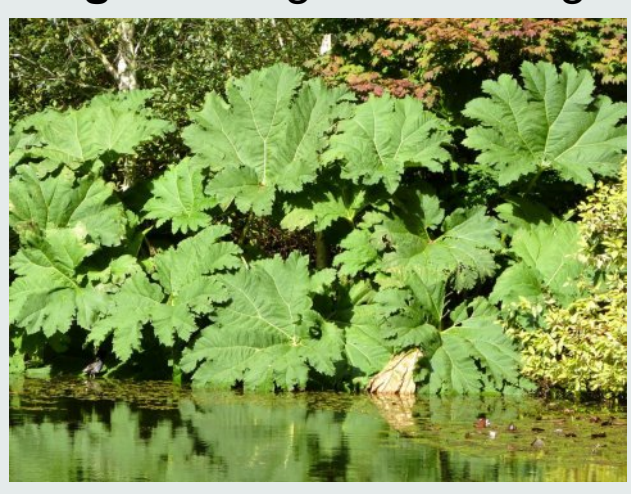


Giant-Rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*) is a large perennial plant. In Ireland, it is considered an invasive species that can rapidly spread in wetland and riparian habitats. The plant spreads through both seed and rhizome fragments, making management challenging. Control strategies include mechanical removal, herbicide application, and preventative measures to limit its spread. If left unmanaged, Giant-Rhubarb can significantly impact local biodiversity and increase the risk of soil erosion.

Description - Giant-Rhubarb is a large, herbaceous perennial plant known for its massive, umbrella-like leaves and tall flower spikes. It has become invasive in various regions. It is often mistaken for the related *Gunnera manicata*, but *G. tinctoria* has distinct characteristics that help to differentiate the two species.

Key characteristics include:

Height: Can grow to a height of 1.5 to 2.5 metres, with the flower spikes reaching up to 1.5 metres tall.



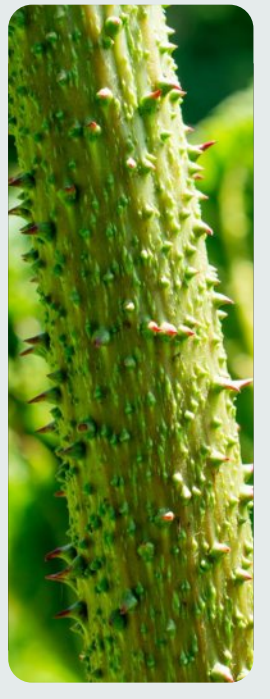
Leaves: The leaves are large and lobed, measuring up to 2 metres in diameter, with a coarse, rough texture. They have deeply toothed or serrated edges and are covered in small spines on the underside. The leaf stalks (petioles) are thick, fleshy, with weak spines, reaching up to 1.5 metres in length.

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Flowers: Produces cone-shaped inflorescences that emerge from the centre of the plant. The small, greenish-red flowers appear on thick, erect spikes in late spring to early summer.



Fruit: Forms small, berry-like fruits that turn red or orange when mature, containing numerous tiny seeds.



Stem: The leaf stalks are thick and fleshy, supporting the large leaves, and are covered in spines or prickles.



Root: Has a large, rhizomatous root system, which allows the plant to spread horizontally. The rhizomes are thick and woody, enabling it to form dense colonies.



Habitat - Giant-Rhubarb is native to Chile and Argentina, where it grows in moist, shaded environments. In introduced regions, it thrives in:

- Wetlands and Riverbanks: Commonly found along stream edges, riverbanks, and wetlands, where the soil remains moist.
- Gardens and Parks: Frequently cultivated as an ornamental plant in gardens and large landscapes, particularly in damp, shaded areas.
- Open Fields and Hillsides: Can establish in open, disturbed areas, where it spreads and forms dense stands.

The plant prefers moist, well-drained soils and grows best in partial shade, although it can tolerate full sun if sufficient moisture is available.

Status in Ireland - In Ireland, Giant-Rhubarb is considered an invasive species, particularly in western regions where the climate and habitat are suitable for its growth.

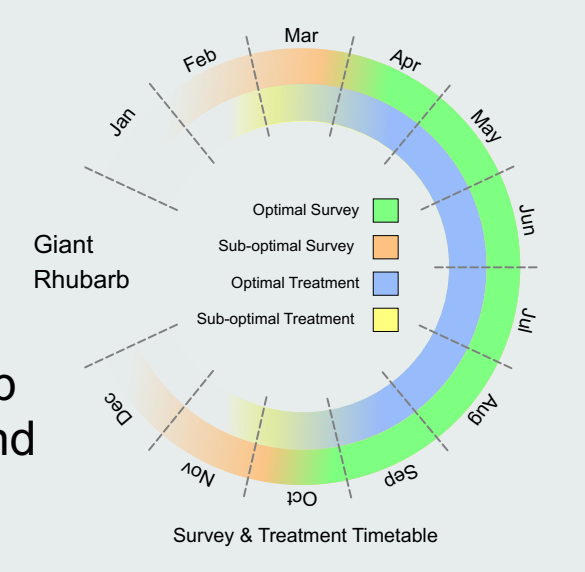
It can spread rapidly in wetland areas, riverbanks, and coastal regions, where it outcompetes native vegetation and alters habitat structure.

Reproduction and Spread - Giant-Rhubarb spreads through both seed production and vegetative propagation:

- Seed Dispersal: Each plant can produce thousands of seeds, which can be dispersed by water, wind, and animals. The seeds can remain viable in the soil for several years.
- Vegetative Propagation: The plant also spreads through its rhizomes, which can regenerate new plants from fragments, allowing it to form dense colonies.

Management and Control - Controlling Giant-Rhubarb requires a combination of mechanical, chemical, and preventive methods:

- Mechanical Control: Digging up the plant and removing the rhizomes is effective for small infestations, but care must be taken to remove all root fragments to prevent regrowth. Cutting or mowing the leaves can reduce the plant's vigour, but repeated treatments are necessary.
- Chemical Control: Herbicides may be applied to the cut leaves or rhizomes, particularly in larger infestations. Multiple treatments may be needed due to the plant's resilience.
- Preventative Measures: Avoid planting Giant-Rhubarb near natural water bodies, and ensure proper disposal of garden waste to prevent accidental spread.



Ecological Impact - Giant-Rhubarb can have several significant ecological impacts, particularly in areas where it becomes invasive:

- Competition with Native Species: Forms dense stands that outcompete native wetland and riparian plants, leading to reduced biodiversity.
- Alteration of Habitat Structure: The plant's large leaves can shade out other vegetation, changing the structure of the habitat and affecting species that require more light.
- Soil Erosion: When the plant dies back in winter, it can leave bare soil exposed, increasing the risk of soil erosion, particularly along riverbanks.



For further information and free advice, please contact:
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