

'Silly season' creates Giant Hogweed media scare

It's known in the media as the silly season, those summer months when the big news stories are in short supply and it's the bizarre and frivolous that help fill their column inches. This year it's been the turn of Giant Hogweed to provide all the hallmarks of a classic media scare story.

It started in July with a local media report of five children left with severe burns and blisters after a brush with Giant Hogweed leaves in a park in Bolton. In the weeks that followed there were more and more incidents reported countrywide and suddenly to read the morning papers, or watch the evening news, people were being hospitalised by hogweed on a daily basis.

Just what is Giant Hogweed? Where does it grow? How do you spot it? The questions, and some questionable answers, came thick and fast. Of course we've been here before, usually with hogweed's more star-struck relative Japanese Knotweed which has never been a stranger to the scare story genre. However, a summer of sensational headlines usually vanish as soon as the schools go back and Parliament returns to address much more pressing 'foreign invasions'.

Of course, for companies like JKC the problems caused by Giant Hogweed do not disappear as soon as the headlines are chip paper. For all that an invasion of giant foreign plant species threatening park-goers and their pet pooches provides the perfect ingredients for a sensational tabloid scare, there are, genuinely, countless people who have been seriously injured through hogweed contact, just as there are hundreds who have had their homes and businesses affected by the scourge of knotweed infestation.

Professional advice on how best to identify and treat these plants therefore remains vitally important, as does the competent and efficient treatment by fully compliant and accredited specialists. The news agenda moves on, the constant need for a reputable and reliable treatment industry never will.