

# Giant Buttercup

*Ranunculus acris*

**Boundary Control Plant under the  
West Coast Regional Pest Plant  
Management Strategy**



## Where has Giant Buttercup come from?

Giant Buttercup was introduced to New Zealand around 1910 and is of European – North Asian origin. Since then it has spread to many key farming areas, notably Golden Bay, although it only has localised presence on the West Coast. However as the plant thrives on well drained land in high rainfall areas, many parts of the West Coast are highly susceptible to infestation.

## What does Giant Buttercup look like?

Growing from a sturdy rhizome, Giant Buttercup becomes a hairy perennial up to 1m tall. Seedlings are initially hard to identify but once the plant begins growing strongly in the early spring, the characteristic adult large, pointed leaves, with deep incisions, make for ready identification. This is further confirmed when the 25mm diameter yellow flowers begin to open in November and December.

## Why is Giant Buttercup a Pest Plant?

Giant Buttercup is a pervasive, difficult to control pastoral weed, particularly on dairy farms where cows avoid it because of its bitter taste. Plant populations tend to increase under dairy grazing pressure. Giant Buttercup also thrives after fertilizer applications and in some areas has become resistant to phenoxy herbicides, such as 24-D, MCPA and MCPB, after repeated applications. Other newer forms of herbicide, whilst having a controlling effect, do not eradicate Giant Buttercup and progress on finding an effective biological control agent has been slow.

With Giant Buttercup seed being easily spread on the hooves and coats of grazing animals, on mowers and haymaking equipment, and in hay made from paddocks containing the plant, sustained vigilance is far and away the best option for property owners. An infestation of Giant Buttercup causes both reduced farm productivity and ongoing control costs. Some dairy farms in the Golden Bay area have major infestations as shown above.



*Top Right: Giant Buttercup reduces available pasture [Internet]  
Above : Giant Buttercup—single plant detail [Pestweb]*

## What is the Boundary Control Rule for Giant Buttercup?

On the West Coast region, a boundary control rule only applies for Giant Buttercup as the plant is too widespread for total control (eradication). The rule states that:

*"Land occupiers must destroy any Giant Buttercup plants within 10m of the boundary when the adjoining land is clear of Giant Buttercup in excess of 50m of that boundary, or is effectively clear of Giant Buttercup."*

## What are the best methods of control?

The best method of control is not to get Giant Buttercup. Prevention is better than cure. Farmers and lifestyle purchasers of hay should ensure that it is not sourced from properties infested by Giant Buttercup and that contract haymakers coming onto their properties have clean machinery. They should also take care with stock movements to, and from, runoff pasture.

### **Manual Methods**

Isolated plants in tilled soils, e.g. home garden, can be dug out easily. However all care must be taken to ensure the large rhizomes are completely removed as even tiny pieces can re-sprout.

### **Herbicide Methods**

If other pasture cover is not a concern, glyphosate based herbicides e.g. (Roundup, Watkins Weedkiller) work well on Giant Buttercup. Use these as per advice of the manufacturer. If other pasture cover is a concern, then use herbicide brands containing the active ingredients Flumet-sulam or MCPB. Both control Giant Buttercup but don't kill grasses or clover.

*For Flumetsulam based herbicides (e.g. Preside)*

- Apply in the warmer months of the year prior to flowering
- Apply 65 grams of *Preside* per hectare
- Enhance control by addition of *Uptake spraying oil* at 500 mls per 100 litres of water
- Ensure all plants are sprayed thoroughly

*For MCPB based herbicides*

- Apply in the warmer months of the year prior to flowering over a 2 year period
- Apply 6 litres of *MCPB* per hectare
- Ensure all plants are sprayed thoroughly
- Repeat treatment in the following spring

**For personal safety please use all herbicides as per manufacturer's labelling**

### **Biocontrols**

A number of field trials have been carried out in Golden Bay since 2000 using the naturally occurring fungus *Schlerotinia sclerotiorum*. The fungus was applied by boom or spot spraying as a live pathogen with some success. However as yet the fungus is not available commercially because further trialling is needed to work out optimum application methods and timing. For an update on this please contact the WCRC Weedbusters Co-ordinator or see [www.landcareresearch.co.nz](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz)

## Where can I get more help?

For further information call either of the Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinators. They are:

**Mary Trayes:** Environmental Information Officer, West Coast Regional Council (768 0466 or 0508 800 118)

**Tom Belton:** Technical Support Officer Biosecurity & Weeds, Department of Conservation, West Coast - Tai Poutini Conservancy, Hokitika (03 756 9100)



[www.weedbusters.org.nz](http://www.weedbusters.org.nz)

*The West Coast Regional Council does not accept liability for any advice given on this sheet regarding application of herbicides for pest plant control. The brand names listed imply neither endorsement of those brands, nor criticism of any other brands not listed.*