

Giant rhubarbs

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Gunnera tinctoria* and *Gunnera manicata*

Native to: South America

Habitat: Damp grassland, woodland and shaded area near water

Large, clump-forming perennials with stout horizontal stems known as rhizomes, massive umbrella-sized leaves and stems up to 2 m tall. Over winter the plant dies down but grows new leaves in spring. Two species are found in the Northern Ireland: Giant-rhubarb (also known as Chilean giant-rhubarb) *Gunnera tinctoria* and Brazilian giant-rhubarb *Gunnera manicata*.

Native to South America, they were introduced as ornamental plants and giant-rhubarb is now often self-sown where long-established and has naturalised in scattered locations throughout Northern Ireland. Brazilian giant-rhubarb, although fertile, has not been found self-sown and is scarcely naturalised in Northern Ireland.

Once established, they can be very invasive and form dense colonies, suppressing native plants as the large leaves prevent other plants growing underneath them. They can also impede water flow through the obstruction of drainage in adjacent streams and rivers particularly when water levels are high.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; grow or cultivate; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Chilean rhubarb; or to release it into the environment.



Key ID Features



Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

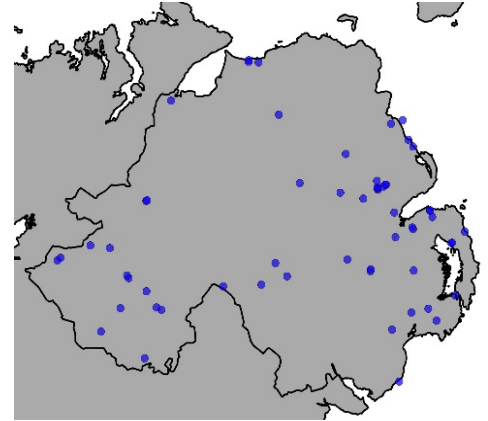
Identification throughout the year

Can be identified at most times of the year, in summer by its large leaves and distinctive flowers (June — August), in winter by the prostrate rhizomes and dead leaf.



Distribution

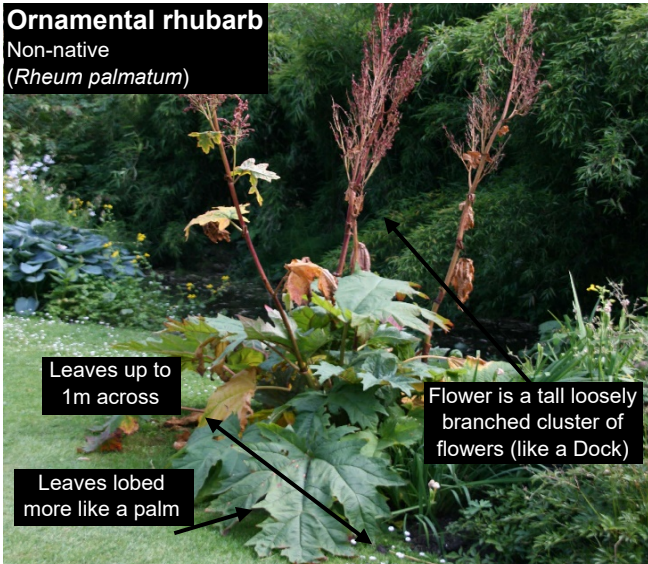
Gunnera tinctoria is spread throughout Northern Ireland.



Source: NBN Atlas Northern Ireland – available at <https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000459164>
Check website for current distribution

Similar Species

Ornamental rhubarb
Non-native
(*Rheum palmatum*)



Cultivated rhubarb
Non-native
(*Rheu, x hybridum*)



There are subtle differences that can be used to distinguish *G. tinctoria* from *G. manicata*. *G. manicata* has leaf stalks with reddish bristles and spines and the inflorescence up to 1.2 m tall (*G. tinctoria* up to 1m). Identification is best determined when plants are fully developed and flowering/fruitletting.

Chilean giant-rhubarb
(*G. tinctoria*)



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Brazilian giant-rhubarb
(*G. manicata*)



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References and further reading:

Preston, C D, Pearman, D A and Dines, T A (editors) (2002) "New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora". Oxford University Press
 Stace, C (1999) "Field Flora of the British Isles". Cambridge University Press
 Scalera, R., Valkenburg J., Bertolino, S., Tricarico, H. & Lapin, K. (2017) IUCN Identification guide of Invasive Alien Species of Union concern.
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Adapted for Northern Ireland Environment Agency 2020