

# Himalayan Balsam

... and how you can help control this invasive, non-native species that can take over whole areas of river and canal bank

This invasive plant (botanical name *Impatiens glandulifera*) was introduced to Britain in the mid 19th Century by Victorian gardeners. It is the tallest annual plant in the UK, growing to a height of over three metres. Himalayan Balsam crowds out native plants and can take over whole areas of river and canal bank. The seeds, up to 800 per plant, are released explosively from the seed pods and can travel for up to seven metres from the plant. If the seeds land in a stream, river or canal they will be taken downstream where they will start a new colony, one of the reasons this plant is so difficult to control.

**Identification guide:** In the spring the hollow stems are pinky red with green shiny leaves. The flowers appear in June and continue until October. These are purplish pink to very pale pink (almost white) and are slipper shaped on long stalks.

Over the last ten years this plant has become more established on many of our waterways. As an annual plant, however, it can be controlled by pulling it up before the seeds develop. If you see it growing when you are out and about on the towpath this summer, please pull up the plants (if it is safe for you to do so) and put them on the side of the towpath to rot down. If this can be done before the seed pods have developed, we will have a few less plants next year.

On certain waterways volunteering events are being organised by branches of The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) and other local

groups to tackle the problem, either by cutting the plants back to ground level or by pulling up the plants from the ground and creating compost piles, before the flowering stage. If you are interested in getting involved in one of these events, or know of an area of waterway that would benefit from a Himalayan Balsam Bashing session, please contact your local navigation authority (contact details for Canal & River Trust on the back of this leaflet) or alternatively contact IWA's Branch Campaign Team.

**Boaters and Walkers:** If you are out and about on the waterways this summer, there are a couple of things you can do to help prevent the spread of this plant. If you see any Himalayan Balsam plants growing, before the seed pods have developed, please pull up the plants (if you can do so safely) and leave them on the side of the towpath to rot down. Report any locations of Himalayan Balsam to your local waterway office. Ensure you don't accidentally carry the seeds to a new area (eg on the bottom of your shoes or on the deck of a boat), and don't place balsam flowers or stems on areas where it was not previously present.

# Organising a Himalayan Balsam Bash

Himalayan Balsam is an invasive non-native species that crowds out other plants. Himalayan Balsam pulls up fairly easily and is completely non-toxic. If you have some on a waterway near you, why not organise a Himalayan Balsam Bash? Here's how:

1. Contact the relevant landowner and/or navigation authority for permission.
2. On Canal & River Trust waterways contact your local Volunteer Co-ordinator for advice and assistance.
3. Agree a date, start time and meeting point with everyone. (The best time of year for pulling up Himalayan Balsam is during June and July)
4. Publicise the event – a poster template is available on the IWA website. Put posters in the locality, tell your local press, invite local groups to join in.
5. Advise the Branch Campaign Team at IWA Head Office so that it can be included in the list of Himalayan Balsam Bashes going on around the country.
6. Agree method to be used – if there are large expanses of just Himalayan Balsam then it may be useful to slash, trim or cut it below the lowest node. Where it is growing in amongst other native plants, pulling it up is the best way. Any control should be undertaken before the plant flowers and sets seed, usually in Late June/ July.
7. Agree locations (off the main towpath) where the pulled up plants will be left to rot (or, any alternative method agreed with the landowner, eg putting it all into empty builders sacks to rot down).
8. Look at the Himalayan Balsam pulling work party risk assessment (available on the IWA website) and adapt it taking into account specific considerations for your site.
9. On the Day – encourage volunteers to turn up to spend a couple of hours in the fresh air by their local waterway. Encourage families to come along – children are welcome so long as they are supervised by a parent or other nominated adult.
10. Tell everyone about it – including the local press, and don't forget to send photos and a write up to the IWA Branch Campaign Team so that it can be included in a round up of Himalayan Balsam work parties on the waterways this summer.

## Contact Details

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