

# Himalayan Balsam

(*Impatiens grandulifera*)

Himalayan or Indian Balsam was introduced to Britain in 1839, but escaped from gardens and rapidly colonised riverbanks and areas of damp ground. Himalayan Balsam grows in dense stands that suppress the growth of native grasses and other flora. In the Autumn, the plants die back, leaving the banks bare of vegetation and vulnerable to erosion.

By 1855 it had spread out of gardens and colonised British waterways. It has since become widely naturalised and is now common in central England and Wales. It is not as numerous in Scotland and east England, but its range is still expanding. In many areas, its spread has been aided by the deliberate scattering of seeds by fans of the plant.

## Characteristics/recognising the plant

Himalayan Balsam is the tallest annual in Britain, growing up to heights of 3m. It is a member of the Balsaminaceae family and is in the same genera as the colourful, bedding *Impatiens* or Busy-Lizzies. The hollow, succulent stems have a purple tinge and are smooth or glabrous. The serrated, pointed leaves are arranged in pairs, or three to a node and are mid-green and are 12-16cm long. The flowers vary from pale pink to purple and appear from June to October.

They produce copious amounts of nectar and are thought to draw pollinating insects in preference to native plants so reducing pollination of the latter.

A single plant can set about 800 seeds, 12 to 14 weeks after flowering. The seed capsules react to the slightest disturbance, causing the five segments to split along their length, then curl up and twist explosively, projecting the contents up to 7 metres away. (This "impatient" release of the seed gives it its approved name, *Impatiens*.)

The black, spherical seeds are about 2 to 3mm across and remain viable for about 2 years, requiring cold stratification for germination which occurs in February or March. They are buoyant and can travel along waterways to infest new areas, even germinating under water.

## Himalayan Balsam and the law

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 - places a duty of care on all waste producers and Himalayan Balsam is identified as a controlled waste. This means it has to be dealt with within your legislative requirement for waste management.

## Control

**Chemical control** - When near water chemical control can be carried out with herbicides containing glyphosate or 2,4-D amine. Glyphosate will kill all plants, whereas 2,4-D amine will only kill broad-leaved weeds; either should be used when the plant is actively growing in early spring for best effect.

**Non-chemical control** - Cutting, mowing or strimming on a regular basis for about three years will be effective and may even eradicate the plant from isolated sites. Shallow rooted plants can be pulled up very easily and disposed of by burning or composting, unless seeds are present. Grazing by cattle and sheep is effective from April throughout the growing season. It should be continued until no new growth occurs.

## References/Further Reading

Himalayan Balsam

[www.arkive.org/himalayan-balsam/impatiens-grandulifera](http://www.arkive.org/himalayan-balsam/impatiens-grandulifera)

Himalayan Balsam, recognition and eradication.

[www.dgsgardening.btinternet.co.uk/himalbal.htm](http://www.dgsgardening.btinternet.co.uk/himalbal.htm)

Managing Himalayan Balsam

[www.carillionplc.com/sustain-2002/documents%5Cpdf%5CTBHimalayanBalsam.pdf](http://www.carillionplc.com/sustain-2002/documents%5Cpdf%5CTBHimalayanBalsam.pdf)

Guidance for the control of invasive weeds in or near fresh water

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk/commondata/105385/booklet\\_895604.pdf](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/commondata/105385/booklet_895604.pdf)



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