

Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is a relative of the Busy Lizzie and is known by a wide variety of common names, including Indian balsam, jumping jack, bee bums, policeman's helmet and poor man's orchid. It is the tallest annual in Britain and can grow up to 3m high.

Introduced to the UK in 1839, as a garden plant, it has now naturalised, especially along riverbanks. Due to its highly invasive nature it has become a problematical weed.

Problems

Biodiversity

As Himalayan balsam tolerates low light levels, germinates early in the season and tends to grow in dense stands it can suppress the growth of native grasses and other flora. This soon leads to the point where it becomes the dominant species,



especially as the explosive nature of Himalayan balsam seedpods can scatter seeds up to 7m from the parent plant. This means that it can disperse upstream as well as downstream, see picture right. Further pollinators, such as bees are more attracted to Himalayan balsam, due to its large nectar production, than native plants which in turn affects the seed production of the natives.

Bank erosion

As an annual Himalayan balsam plants die back, after flowering, leaving river banks bare of vegetation and vulnerable to erosion.

Recognition.

Himalayan Balsam is a tall, robust, annual with hollow sappy brittle stems. Leaves as spear shaped with serrated edge. The flowers are helmet/slipper-shaped produced in clusters and are purplish pink. These are followed by seedpods July – October that open explosively when ripe, shooting their seeds up to 7m (22ft) away.

Treatment

The aim of any treatment is to kill the plant or to prevent flowering/seeding.

Non chemical control:

These methods although labour intensive are highly effective environmentally friendly and should be used where ever possible and certainly in sensitive areas such as nature reserves.

Cutting/mowing/strimming: cut the plants at ground level using a scythe before the flowering stage in June. Do not cut earlier as this promotes greater seed production in any plants that regrow. Note plants can regrow within the same season after cutting etc. and so continual monitoring should be undertaken to prevent reseeding. The first monitoring visit should be timed shortly after cutting, as Himalayan Balsam has been known to re-grow within weeks of control. This method of control should not be attempted once the seed heads have formed, as this would effectively spread the plant.

Cutting/mowing/strimming should be repeated annually until no more growth occurs. This can take 2 to 5 years

Hand Pulling: as Himalayan Balsam is a shallow-rooted plant it can be pulled up very easily and disposed of by burning or composting. **Note** if seed heads are present plants must not be composted.

Chemical control

Please note the use of any herbicides must be done in accordance with the instructions supplied with the chemical. If you are unsure please contact the supplier or a licensed spraying contractor. Further spraying near to a watercourse is restricted and requires written permission from SEPA.

Chemical control is a most effective method to kill the plant particularly when there are large stands which makes non-chemical control impractical. Spraying can start as soon as the plant is about 1m high, usually in May and continue throughout the summer. More than one application in any one season is often necessary, in particular to eliminate regeneration from the soil seed source. Follow-up spraying will be required to kill seedlings in subsequent years and it is recommended that the site is monitored for a period of five years.

The herbicide should be applied during favourable weather i.e. not windy to prevent drift and not raining to prevent wash off.

The herbicide should be applied directly to the plants, using either a sprayer with a coarse/large droplet size or more directly using a weed wiper.

The plant should show die back within two weeks, dead leaves and stalks should be allowed to dry and can then be disposed of preferably by burning, or digging into the soil.

It should be noted that the flower heads on any plants that survive chemical treatment should be removed to prevent the production of seeds. These heads should be either buried at least 1m deep on site or incinerated.

A variety of herbicides can be used, however the final choice will be dependent on the habitat that is to be sprayed.

In particular if the plant is growing adjacent to a watercourse. In this case it is recommended that a glyphosate based herbicide is used and permission is sought from the local SEPA office prior to any works starting.

Note Care must be taken when handling herbicides and in the case of any spillage into either the water or soil adjacent to the watercourse. it must be soaked up immediately using dry sand or soil, bagged and removed off site for appropriate disposal, and SEPA informed

The herbicide must be stored and mixed away from any watercourse.

For further information and advice on Invasive species contact:

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

SEPA

Corporate office

Erskine Court

Castle Business Park

Stirling

Tel: 01786 457700

Fax: 01786 446885

Scottish Natural Heritage

SNH

The Beta Centre,

Innovation Park,

University of Stirling,

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Tel: 01786 450362

Fax: 01786 451974

Thanks to Clackmannanshire and Stirling Environment Trust for the use of this leaflet.
Please do not contact them regarding any issues with Invasive species.