

Himalayan balsam control



Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is a relative of the Busy Lizzie. It is known by a wide variety of common names, including Indian balsam, jumping jack and policeman's helmet. Himalayan balsam is a tall robust annual, producing clusters of purple or pinkish white flowers. These are followed by seed pods which when ripe, open explosively ejecting seed for up to 7m. Each plant can produce over 700 seeds.

Himalayan balsam was introduced to the UK around 1839 and is now naturalised, especially on riverbanks and many waste places. It is now a problematical weed tolerating low light levels and able to shade out other vegetation, thus impoverishing habitats. Himalayan balsam is sometimes found growing in gardens uninvited or deliberately as a decorative plant where great care must be taken to ensure that it does not escape into the wild.

Cultural Control

The main objective of control measures is to prevent flowering and setting of seed. This can be by pulling or cutting plants before they flower, or herbicide treatment, again before flowering.

Herbicide Treatment

The use of herbicides adjacent to waterways is restricted and requires approval from the Environment Agency. Herbicides should only be applied by suitably qualified operators or contractors.

Himalayan balsam can be controlled with herbicides based on glyphosate, such as Roundup. Glyphosate is a non-selective, systemic herbicide that is applied to the foliage. Care is required to ensure that spray does not drift onto the foliage of adjacent plants. Glyphosate is most effective when weed growth is vigorous. As with most weeds, this usually occurs just before the flowering stage around mid-summer.

It may take up to two or three seasons to obtain good control owing to seed residual in the soil which readily germinates developing into more weed seedlings.