



The Balsam Project

A guide to identification and removal of Himalayan Balsam for volunteers

Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is increasing on the Cam and Granta and their tributaries. It grows in moist and semi-shaded places, and thin woodlands, and prefers soft banks by slow-moving water along streams and rivers. Removal usually involves hand pulling sometimes with mechanical removal for large stands. We recommend that the whole plant is removed by hand pulling preferably before flowering, or if the stem is cut it must be below the first node to prevent regrowth and multi shooting. Attempts to remove plants should cease when seed pods have formed to avoid unintentional local spread.



Pulled plants should be discarded in piles away from the watercourse and on dry ground, and the roots should not be allowed to make contact with the soil. Two or even three visits in a season may be necessary to find late germinated or otherwise delayed plants.

Balsam removal along a watercourse should be methodical, first addressing the uppermost source of seed. Seeds are dispersed downstream either by floating in water or carried in sediment and if areas downstream are tackled too early in the program they will often become recolonised and the effort is wasted.

“Bashing”: Pulling out plants carefully by hand usually allows the entire plant to be removed as the root system is shallow. Ideally plants are removed well before flowering when they have less bulk and will decompose or desiccate faster. Flowering plants may still be pulled safely but only until seed pods have formed. Thereafter bashing will still have some benefit as flowering continues well after the first seed pods form, and removal of plants will reduce total seed production. Bashing when seed pods are maturing is to be avoided as the pods explosively release seeds at the slightest touch and this can exacerbate the problem locally.

Bashing often entails walking (safely and carefully) along the river bed in chest waders especially where the bank is steep and inaccessible. If not within easy reach because of the terrain, the plants can be slashed and dragged back with a long poled swoe-style hoe. A hoe is also useful when nettles are troublesome.

Mechanical strimming: This is useful for larger patches, but not on steep bank sides or where brash on the ground prevents low cutting.

Herbicide application: The use of an Approved herbicide (e.g. one based on glyphosate) by a certificated operator may sometimes be considered and can be effective. Chemicals have not been used by CVF working parties.

Stay safe: Himalayan Balsam is safe to handle, but working near a watercourse or on rough terrain can be hazardous, and working alone is potentially dangerous, so stay within your comfort zone.

“Check–Clean–Dry” equipment, to avoid transferring Balsam seeds or other alien, non-native species to new locations.

If you wish to help us, consider joining a working party – further information can be found at <https://camvalleyforum.uk/>

Identification Guide

Leaves: Slender, oval and shiny about 15cm up to 25 cm long, finely serrated leaf margins arranged on the stem either opposite or in bunches of three. **Stem:** Hollow, brittle, smooth, with reddish nodes and green / red stems; 0.5 to 5cm in diameter. **Flowers:** Flowers rarely white, usually pink or purple-pink, three petals and trumpet shaped with a sharp bent spur at the back. **Seed pods (capsules):** 2.5–5 cm long and hang down from red stalks; explode at the slightest touch when ripe. **Roots:** Shallow; larger plants have red fleshy roots emerging from stem base, fibrous roots brown.



Typical plant structure



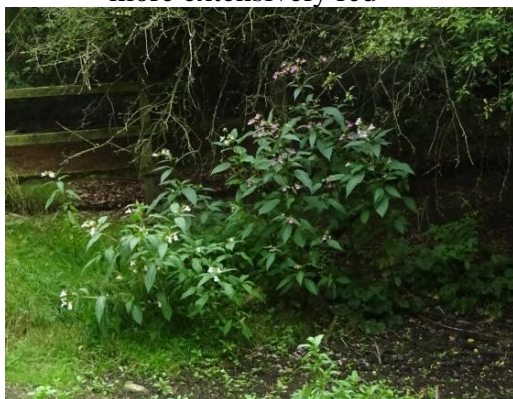
Flowers white (rarely) to purple-pink



Stem colour variable, some stems are more extensively red



Large patch, often 50 plants occupy each per square metre



Small clump in semi shade dry watercourse



Seed pods (capsules); immature seeds cream, ripe seeds dark; ripe pods explode on touch.

Confusion species



Great Willowherb, very common; #1 confusion species if viewed from afar



Great Willowherb, flower and seed pods



**Orange Balsam, smaller, orange flowers with red spots,
uncommon in our area**



Comfrey



Marsh Woundwort, up to 100 cm high



Purple Loosestrife



Common Figwort



Common Figwort



Rosebay Willowherb