



Amenity Forum Guidance Document

Best Practice Note for Himalayan Balsam Control

Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is covered by the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, meaning it is an offence to cause the plant to spread or grow in the wild. Landowners may also be subject to enforcement under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill 2014.

Plant material and soils containing the plant or its seeds are all classed as controlled waste for the purposes of the Environment Protection Act 1990 and must be disposed of at a licensed landfill site in accordance with the Act. This applies whether the material is alive or dead. Disposal can be expensive, with potential for cross-contamination and with little practical benefit compared to other treatment methods.

Himalayan Balsam is the tallest annual in the UK and is known to colonise waste ground, woodland and grassland, especially wetter areas. It is particularly common on river corridors and other watercourses. Because of the shallow, temporary root system, soils often become loose and subject to erosion, which can increase levels of sediment in watercourses, causing significant problems for fauna in watercourses, including trout.

The plant is characterised in spring by long, spear-shaped (lanceolate) leaves and rapid vertical growth, reaching up to 3m by June. The stems are fleshy and generally dull green and/or dark red. Plants bear multiple pink or white hooded flowers from around July through to the end of the growing season around October.

Himalayan Balsam spreads exclusively by seeds – which are expelled explosively by small seed pods, formed from late July/August onwards. These seed pods can propel their seeds up to 7m (although 2-3m is normal). Recent studies indicate that seeds have limited viability beyond the first over-wintering.

When planning Himalayan Balsam control, the Sustainable Use Directive is particularly relevant. The plant is not harmful to health and can only spread by seeds. In the majority of circumstances, Himalayan balsam can be effectively controlled without resorting to pesticide use, through the use of appropriate physical control methods (especially hand-pulling or strimming).

Timing of treatments is key – treatments carried out too late will likely have no significant effect because the seeds will have already been spread. In all cases, the final treatment of the year should be carried out before the plant has chance to form seeds.

If strimmed or cut sufficiently close to the ground, Himalayan balsam plants generally do not re-grow. Uprooting plants can also be effective, however, formation of new growth and/or roots has been observed in uprooted plants. For this reason, appropriate storage and disposal of cut or pulled plant material is required (noting that removal from site would be subject to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990).

If mechanical removal is carried out prior to the formation of seeds, re-growth the following year can be greatly reduced – although multiple years of treatment may be required to deal with the seed bank in the area. The likelihood of cross-contamination from off-site infestation is significant, and even a single plant or seed can soon give rise to a large infestation, so regular monitoring is recommended.

Chemical herbicide treatment can be accomplished by methods including foliar sprays, once the plant has developed fully-formed leaves. Consult your supplier or agronomist for advice on suitable herbicides and directions and restrictions on their use.

Two spray applications per year can generally be achieved, if timed correctly. As above, the final treatment should be applied early enough to prevent the plant from forming seeds. The timings, methods of application and areas of use vary for each product – always read the label carefully.

Environment Agency approval is required before use in aquatic areas, and the Sustainable Use Directive expressly requires that herbicide use should be minimised in these areas – so physical control should be the preferred option.

Attempts by CABI at introducing biological control (a rust fungus) are in progress.

Further Reading

UK Government Guidance Note on the reform of anti-social behaviour powers

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/364846/Japanese_Knotweed_information_note.pdf