



# **HIMALAYAN BALSAM**

## **community toolkit**

**SPECIES  
SURVIVAL  
FUND**



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# What is Himalayan balsam?

Himalayan balsam is a plant native to western and central Himalayas. It was brought to the UK in 1839, due to its beautiful flowers and striking leaves and stem. However, like many plant species brought across it soon escaped and has since been causing many problems for our native species.

It is most often seen along water courses, as its seeds are very easily dispersed and spread by water to new areas it can colonise.

## Fact file

Scientific name: *Impatiens glandulifera*

When to see it: May-September

Size: up to 2m tall

Conservation status: Invasive non-native



## Issues

Himalayan balsam forms incredibly dense stands, outcompeting native plants for space, light and nutrients. When it dies back in the winter, it leaves nothing but bare earth which is easily eroded away by water.

Each individual plant can produce over 800 seeds, which are dispersed over 7m around the plant due to its explosive seed pods, so it can quickly take over an area.

Himalayan balsam has a reputation for being good for pollinators, with its bright pink flowers. However, because of their deep, bucket like shape there are actually very few insects in the UK that can access its nectar and pollen, and so insect diversity declines dramatically in areas where balsam has taken over due to lack of food plants. By contrast, all the native species that should be there provide food for many insects.

Himalayan balsam seed is only viable in the soil for 1-2 years. This is positive news, because it means if we successfully remove the plants for a couple of years with targeted intervention, we have a good chance of stopping it spreading further



# How to identify Himalayan balsam

## Flowers

Distinctive pink flowers in various shades, occasionally white.  
Deep and bucket like with a sweet smell.



## Leaves

Long slender leaves, shaped like a spear head.  
Have a finely serrated edge, and a reddish-pink stalk.



## Stems

Stems are green with dark reddish pink colouring at its joints, known as 'nodes'. It is important to break off the bottom node of the plant at its roots to prevent it regrowing.  
Stems are hollow, like tubes, for moving water in the plant.

## Seeds

Seeds are small, round and dark. They are found within long green seed pods that burst with explosive power, scattering the seeds far and wide.



# How to remove Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam is a shallow rooted plant, which makes it very easy to remove. Simply take a firm hold of the plant's stem, as low down as you can, and smoothly pull it out of the ground. Once you have pulled it up, snap off the roots from the stem below the first node. This ensures that the plant does not re-grow. If the stem snaps as you pull it, make sure to repeat the steps above to remove the roots and prevent it growing back. It can be left in piles to rot down.

Himalayan balsam can be pulled from May to July. It is important to try and remove it before it forms seed pods, as once they have ripened they scatter out over great distances, and become easily spread during pulling.

## Tools:

- Gardening gloves
- First aid kit
- Hand wash or sanitiser
- Copy of a risk assessment (see our template below)
- Emergency contacts for volunteers
- A phone with good signal

## ★ IMPORTANT ★

**Don't forget to ask permission from the landowner before going to pull balsam from their land**

## Top tip

**Make sure to start removing balsam upstream, working your way downstream. This helps prevent accidentally spreading it to areas you have already cleared while you work along the riverbank with a group.**

## Biosecurity

**We don't want to accidentally spread Himalayan balsam while we are trying to remove it. Make sure your boots and kit are clean after each session, with no plant fragments or seeds on them.**

**You can use a stiff brush to do this.**

Check out our how-to video on how to identify and remove Himalayan balsam here:



# Risk assessment

A risk assessment is an important document to have with you when you are working with a group carrying out a task like Himalayan balsam removal.

It lists all the potential things that could go wrong, who could be harmed, how serious it would be if it happened, and the measures you can take to prevent them.

There are 5 steps to completing a risk assessment:

1. Identify the hazard
2. Identify who could be harmed by the hazard
3. Put some measures in place to reduce the impact of the hazard
4. Record this information in a risk assessment table (see our example below)
5. Review and update your risk assessment regularly so it is kept up to date and relevant

**Remember, risk assessments are really important so don't skip them!**

It's good practice to keep a copy of your risk assessment at each session for everyone to read and familiarise themselves with

For more information and guidance on creating your own risk assessment, check out this link for the Health and Safety Executive:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>

Guidance on creating a risk assessment are given here by NWT, however the responsibility of creating and managing it are with the group.



# Risk assessment template

Use this template to fill out your own risk assessment for Himalayan Balsam removal. Some examples have been included, but make sure you add ones specific to your site and group too.

Date risk assessment was created:  
Name of person creating risk assessment:


Date of next risk assessment review:

Hazard	Person at risk	Control measures
Slips, trips and falls	Volunteers/staff	Suitable, sturdy footwear, such as walking boots, must be worn
Stinging or thorny plants	Volunteers/staff	Gloves and long sleeves must be worn while working
Insect bites	Volunteers/staff	Insect repellent can be worn, as well as long sleeves and trousers. Check for ticks and remove properly
Working around water	Volunteers/staff	No lone working around water. A throw line should be kept and life jackets worn if working in close proximity to the water. Wash hands properly before eating, drinking or smoking
Sun exposure	Volunteer/staff	Take regular breaks to hydrate. Make sure sunscreen and a hat are worn on hot days









You can record any sightings of Himalayan balsam, or other invasive species, on these websites:

- <https://irecord.org.uk/enter-non-native-records>
- <https://innsmapper.org/home>

This helps us build up a picture of invasive species spread in the UK



# Recording Himalayan balsam removal

Recording where you and your community group have removed Himalayan balsam is useful information to help map out everyone's collective efforts, see where balsam is eradicated and see where new efforts could be put.

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An easy and useful tool for doing this is using What3Words to record where you start pulling balsam at the beginning of the day, and where you finish at the end. If the balsam you are removing isn't along linear features like a river, but in patches, you could record the W3W location for each patch you clear.

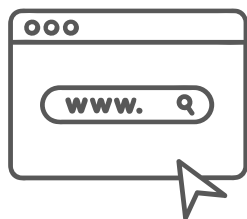
You can also use the measure function on Google Earth for free to measure the distance or size of the area you have cleared.

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We would love for your group to become part of the Wilder Nottinghamshire Network, whether you are a small group of friends or a whole neighbourhood! You can map your action on our online map, as well as see what other people in your local area are doing for nature. By joining the network you will also receive access to free workshops, networking events, training, resources and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

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## Useful websites for mapping your Himalayan balsam removal:



[www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/wilder-nottinghamshire](http://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/wilder-nottinghamshire)

[www.what3words.com](http://www.what3words.com)

[earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com)

So, remember to record the following on each session with your team:

- The date
- The start and finish time
- The location, using GPS, What3Words etc.
- Before and after photos
- If you can, the area cleared using Google Earth or similar

# Himalayan balsam volunteer form

The following template can be used each time your group meets to pull balsam. Make sure to have a risk assessment too!

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start time:

**Finish time:**

Location(s):

By providing your details below you are confirming that you have read and accept the risk assessment.

Your contact details will be held for 2 weeks after the event and never be shared with a third party.

By giving photo consent, you agree any images of you taken during the day may be used to promote the groups work, such as on social media or printed or electronic materials. They will not be used for any other purpose.

[illegible]

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[illegible]



## Become a balsam warrior today!

So, by now you should have a good idea of why we need to tackle Himalayan balsam, and how to go about doing it.

Whether you round up some neighbours, add a purpose to your walk with friends, get your dog walking group, school or angling club on board or join an already established volunteer group or event, anyone can help with removing Himalayan balsam in Nottinghamshire. So why not start today and help us contribute to a healthier and wilder river catchment.

Don't forget to share your photos and stories with us on social media or through the Wilder Nottinghamshire Network.

### Useful links for further information



Nottinghamshire  
Wildlife Trust  
community hub



Thriving in a Wilder  
Trent

### Remember....

Removing Himalayan balsam is a great way to help nature on your doorstep, give something back to your local community, meet new people, get outside and do something for your physical and mental health.

Above all else, have fun, stay safe and happy balsam bashing!

