

Never say too late

If there are flowers on the Himalayan balsam you can still pull it.

Take care to **mash the flowers** along with the rest of the plant you have pulled and stuff them in the middle of your pile so that even if they manage to set seed, they won't be able to propel it very far.

Once the seed pods have formed you need to take extra care to **contain the seeds which will explode** in all directions the moment you touch the plant.

In this case it's better to deal with the top of the balsam plant first – **tip the head into a bucket or put a bag over it and snap the stem a bit lower down** then you can pull the rest of the plant as normal and dispose of the seedy heads in the middle of the pile as you would with the flowers.



The plant that loves you

Himalayan balsam has one last trick up its sleeve. It won't want to let you go!

As new plants can grow from small fragments with an intact node and the seeds are viable for a couple of years, it can hitch a ride out to pastures new on the soles of your shoes or the hem of your coat.

Your dog might also act as a carrier for plants and seeds. Please make sure you only take home the pets you really want in your life and avoid the opportunist hitch-hikers!

Remember:

1. **Check everything before you leave the site.**
2. **Clean off any mud or vegetation that might be harbouring seeds.**
3. **Dry everything properly before you use it again.**



Your guide to Bashing Balsam



Guerilla tactics for fighting Himalayan balsam: what to do and how to do it

Himalayan balsam is an invasive non-native annual plant which is so successful at growing in the UK that it has now become a real problem.

It can crowd or shade out other (native) plants, is preferentially pollinated by insects and produces lots of seeds which are propelled up to 4m in all directions and germinate very easily.

However, it is non-toxic and loosely-rooted so it is also very easy for you to join in the fight to get rid of it - perhaps when out for a leisurely walk!

Getting started

Permission to pull

- * If you are on a road, public footpath or right of way you do not need any special permission to do a bit of guerrilla balsam bashing.
- * If you see Himalayan balsam growing in a field or garden or on any private property you will need to ensure you have landowner permission before you can pull it up.

Keep yourself safe

- * Look out for cars, cattle and water and if in doubt, **do not pull**.
- * Wear gardening gloves, long-sleeve tops and trousers as balsam is often found amongst nettles.
- * Do not enter the water to pull balsam unless the water is shallow and clear, you know the river well, you stay within your depth and are a strong swimmer!



Any balsam pulling you do is entirely at your own risk. The information provided in this leaflet is a guide to help you pull the right plant safely!

Eden Rivers Trust cannot be held liable (and you are not covered by our insurance) for anything that happens as a result of your actions.

Is it Himalayan balsam?

Pink flowers are not enough

Please make sure the plant you want to pull up is actually Himalayan balsam - and remember it is not the only plant with pink flowers! Here are some pictures to help with identification:



leaves are commonly in 3s



Flowers in summer can be pink to lilac colour



Can grow over 2m tall!



Beware the explosive seed pods!

Features to look out for include:

- * Mostly found in damp or wet areas, alongside rivers, railways, roads and paths,
- * Toothed leaves either opposite or in whorls of 3,
- * Hollow, fleshy stems,
- * Possibly pink tinges on stem, leaves and roots,
- * Loosely rooted. If it is hard to pull up, you might have a different plant,
- * Can grow very tall - over 2m,
- * Pink flowers; mostly in late summer,
- * Explosive seed pods after the flowers.

Time to bash

Ideally Himalayan balsam plants should be pulled up before they flower – **June** is usually a good time as, in most years, they won't have flowered at this point but the plants should be tall enough to spot amongst thick vegetation.

Once the seed pods have formed (after flowering) pulling the plants without setting off the seeds is very difficult.

How to pull Himalayan balsam

To pull up the plant, **grab the stem as near to the ground as you can** and **pull gently** to ensure you pull the root out.

If the stem snaps off, you should check the rooted fragment left in the ground and pull it out if possible or if not, break it off as near to the ground as you can so it will not be able to grow up again.

Balsam never dies

Dropping the pulled plant on the ground where it was growing can make matters worse rather than better – Himalayan balsam can re-root and continue to grow (and flower and set seed) if the root ball is intact.

It can also root and then shoot from every node along the stem, ending up with several plants instead of one. As each plant could produce up to 300 seeds, a bit of maths shows how serious the repercussions of this might be!

Once you have pulled up a plant it's best to destroy it:

- * Start with the root – **break this off as low as possible**, making sure you are breaking the stem between the root and the first node.
- * Then **mash, twist, tear and rip up** the rest of the stem. Beware - Himalayan balsam can re-grow from the nodes along the stem if they are left intact!
- * Finally **make a pile** with your ripped up plants (in the sun, so it will compost and out of reach of the river, so it won't be washed downstream) and stomp it into a mush so there is no chance of anything regrowing.

Every bit of bashing you do makes a massive difference – pulling up just 10 plants will stop 3000 seeds being produced – and 3000 plants growing next year. Left unpulled that adds up to 900,000 plants the following year!

