

HIMALAYAN BALSAM (*IMPATIENS GLANDULIFERA*):
Did you know this plant is considered invasive in Manitoba?
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Originally from India and the western Himalayas, this attractive orchid-like plant (also known as Policeman's helmet, Indian balsam, and Poor Man's orchid) was introduced as an ornamental to many parts of Europe, New Zealand and North America. It has escaped cultivation to invade natural areas in these regions. In Canada, Himalayan balsam is found in eight provinces: British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. Locally, it is found growing in some gardens and on two river bank areas in Winnipeg. ISCM hopes to stop the spread of this plant through volunteer reporting and removal.



Himalayan balsam flower. Photo credit: Jan Samanek, State Phytosanitary Administration, Bugwood.org

Himalayan balsam is an annual succulent herb with stems that are smooth, reddish-colored and hollow. Plants can grow up to three meters (10 ft) tall. Leaves are opposite or whorled, red-toothed, and occur in pairs or threes. Flowers are small, pink to purple in color, and shaped like an English policeman's helmet (which describes another common name given). Himalayan balsam is capable of producing 800 seeds in pods which explode when ripe and eject their seeds up to five meters. Seeds will float and quickly be

transported along waterways to infest new areas. Gardeners often pass on the seed to friends due to its ornamental beauty.

Himalayan balsam will grow in agricultural areas, natural forests, disturbed areas, rangelands, riverbanks, wetlands, and gardens. In areas of introduction there are no natural enemies (e.g. disease, predators or competition) to keep this plant in check, and it will aggressively grow and spread.



Himalayan balsam stem. Photo Credit: Michael Shephard, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org.

Dense stands of Himalayan balsam can form which prevent establishment of native plants, make stream banks vulnerable to erosion when the shallow-rooted plants die back, and reduce overall biodiversity and ecological value of the land.

To prevent the spread of Himalayan balsam, the Invasive Species Council of Manitoba encourages Manitobans

not to purchase, sell, plant, or exchange seeds of this known invasive plant. Please remove flowers before seed set and report sightings of this plant to ISCM to assist with its control. For more information please contact us at (204) 232-6021 or info@invasivespeciesmanitoba.com. Visit our website at www.invasivespeciesmanitoba.com for a "What Not to Plant" list for gardeners.



Himalayan balsam infestation. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institute, Richard A. Howard Photograph Collection.