TACKLING

Himalayan Balsam *(Impatiens glandulifera)*

Invasive species have significant impacts on the environment, human health, infrastructure and the economy in the Metro Vancouver region.

Himalayan balsam was introduced to Canada as an ornamental plant. Each plant can produce thousands of seeds in pods that explode, allowing it to spread rapidly. It is found in areas with wet soil and is predicted to become more widespread in BC.

IMPACTS

This plant can quickly dominate a variety of environments, spreading up to 32,000 seeds per square metre. It is particularly damaging along creeks, riverbanks and ditches. When the plants die off in the winter, the ground is left bare, which increases soil erosion.

IDENTIFICATION

There are a number of other *Impatiens* species in BC that Himalayan balsam could be confused with, especially in the absence of flowers.

- **Lifecycle:** Plants live for only one season
- **Stem:** Smooth and hollow with distinct segments, 0.6 – 3 metres tall
- **Leaves:** 5–20 centimetres long, dark green with jagged edges and a red vein down the middle; grow on opposite sides of the stem, or in a circular shape around the stem
- **Flowers:** Pink to fuchsia colour; resemble slippers or orchid flowers; bloom in summer
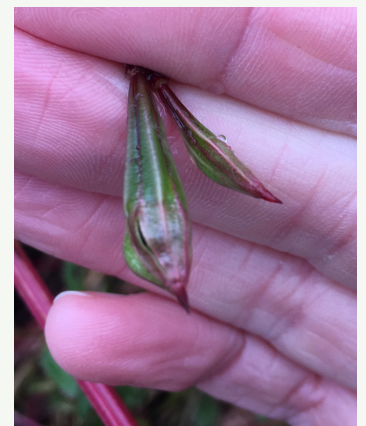

Flower
CREDIT: ISCMV

Leaves
CREDIT: ISCMV

Ripe, unopened seed pods
CREDIT: ISCMV

- **Seeds:** Seed pods burst when ripe, ejecting seeds up to seven metres away from the plant that will grow into new plants the following year

PREVENTION AND CONTROL

To prevent further spread across the region and beyond, it is best not to purchase, trade or grow Himalayan balsam. If this plant is already present, it is critical to ensure it does not invade adjacent yards, parks and natural areas. Effective invasive plant management typically involves a variety of control methods. The following table summarizes the recommended techniques for controlling Himalayan balsam on private property or where permission has been granted by the land owner or manager.

CONTROL STRATEGY	TECHNIQUES	SUITABLE SITES	NOTES
Manual	Pull by hand before seeds form, removing every plant at the site	Individual plants, sites of any size, sites with other plants	• Causes minimal harm to surrounding plants • May disturb seeds in soil and encourage growth of new plants • Repeat monthly during the growing season
	Cut the top of the plant to prevent seeds from forming	Sensitive sites or areas where you cannot easily pull by hand	• Causes minimal harm to surrounding plants • Plants can continue to grow after cutting
Mechanical	Mow or brush cut before seeds form	Large sites that are not close to water	• May harm surrounding plants • Plants can continue to grow after cutting • May reduce soil erosion compared to other control methods

Control should always take place before seeds burst (late May to early June) to avoid their spread. If the seed pods have formed but have not yet burst, control is possible but remove the plants from the site as they can still mature. The goal should be to control all plants at the site, as missing even one flowering plant can undo all removal efforts. Restore the area with native or non-invasive plants, monitor for regrowth, and remove seedlings for several years.

How Can You Help?

- Control invasive plants and replace them with a non-invasive alternative. Check out **growgreenguide.ca** for suggestions.

- Avoid walking in areas with ripe seed pods so they don't spread. Remove any plant parts or seeds from clothing, pets, tools, vehicles, etc.

- Do not place invasive plants in your backyard composter as the temperature will not become hot enough to destroy the seeds and roots.

- To reduce the spread of invasive species, dispose of yard waste and soil appropriately. Visit your municipality's website for more information.

- Download the '**Report Invasives BC**' app to identify and report invasive species.

- Join a stewardship group and help remove invasive species from local parks.

A volunteer removing Himalayan balsam
CREDIT: S. RUSHTON

For the complete set of best management practices for Himalayan balsam, and other key invasive species, visit **MetroVancouver.org** and search 'Invasive Species'.