

Himalayan Balsam

not just another pretty flower



Himalayan Balsam is an annual plant native to the Himalayas that is reducing native plant populations, degrading wildlife habitat, and encouraging soil erosion within the region. Its delicate orchid-like blossoms in colours from pink to white, grow in profusion along a hollow

stem reaching one to three metres tall. It reproduces through seeds that explode from their pods, upon being touched when mature and can travel up to 6.5 metres away from the parent plant. Expelled seeds can survive and germinate into a new plant within two years of their release.

Himalayan Balsam thrives on moist, nutrient rich habitats, especially on lake, pond, stream, and river banks. It has an insignificant root system that extends only four to six inches into the soil and being an annual dies back each fall. It is primarily introduced to new areas through horticultural practices including the escape from cultivated gardens, plant exchanges, seed exchanges, dumping of contaminated yard waste, and movement of contaminated soil.



Once established, Himalayan Balsam forms dense stands that cover the soil and suffocate any underlying or adjacent vegetation. This is especially problematic along the banks of rivers, lakes, ponds, and streams. The Himalayan

Balsam populates the banks and chokes out the fibrously rooted native vegetation. Its minimal root system is not designed to provide any soil stabilization support, therefore promoting erosion along the banks it invades.

Adding to this problem, is the annual life cycle of the plant; during the fall, winter, and spring months the plant is dead, leaving wide expanses of soil along the areas it invades open to further erosion and destabilization.

Control Options:

Mechanical

The shallow root system makes this plant an easy one to hand-pull. It is important to pull plants before seeds are produced, bag all plant material, and dispose of bags in the designated 'Invasive Plant' bins at the City of Quesnel Landfill. Follow up treatments will be necessary to deal with plants that will germinate from any seeds produced and released by the plants prior to being pulled for a period of two years.

Chemical

Herbicides effectively manage Himalayan Balsam infestations, but need to be applied before plants flower. Plants treated with herbicides that are in flower will still produce viable seed. Carefully read and follow herbicide labels before purchase and use.

Alternatives:

Instead of planting Himalayan Balsam, try one of these great, non-invasive alternatives:

- Pink Turtle (*Chelone lyonii*, *C. oblique*)
- Larkspur (*Delphinium* spp.)
- Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra Formosa* or *Dicentra spectabilis*)
- Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)
- Beard-tongue (*Penstemon barbatus*)
- Red Columbine (*Aquilegia Formosa*)
- Western Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum occidentale*)

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