



INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES OF PEI:

Himalayan Balsam

Impatiens glandulifera



What are invasive species?

Invasive species are species that are introduced to an area outside of their native range. They can be introduced intentionally or unintentionally.

Why are invasive species a problem?

Once they establish, invasive plants can reproduce quickly because they have no natural predators or pathogens to keep them in check, and they often become the dominant species in an ecosystem. This can have devastating effects on the environment. Invasive species can displace native plants by monopolizing space, light, water and other resources needed for growth. They can completely alter native plant communities and drastically lower biodiversity. Invasive species can also adversely affect the economy and human health, and interfere with recreational activities.

HISTORY

Himalayan balsam originally came from the Western Himalayas. It was introduced to Canada in the early 1900s as an ornamental garden flower. It is now considered a pest in many countries throughout the world. In Prince Edward Island it can be seen along several trails and roads.

IDENTIFICATION

Himalayan balsam is fairly easy to identify, especially if it is in flower. Here are some distinguishing features you can look for:

- Grows to be 2m tall
- Red bamboo-like stem
- Distinct flower with sac structure
- Flowers are deep pink to white
- Flowers bloom from June – October
- Seed pods are teardrop-shaped and the slightest pressure will cause them to explode and release seeds
- Leaves are long, slender, sharply-toothed and arranged oppositely
- Forms large, dense stands



CONCERN

Himalayan balsam exhibits a very high reproduction rate. It germinates earlier than many native plants and forms dense stands which make it difficult for native plants to establish. Its stems are high in polysaccharides, which makes them more resistant to decomposition, so when the stems die and fall over they can repress native species the following year. Himalayan balsam also has a weak root system, and when it establishes in riparian zones it can increase erosion.

HABITAT

Himalayan balsam inhabits urban areas, disturbed areas, gardens, and freshwater wetlands. It grows best in full sun but tolerates some shade.





CONTROL

Physical removal is the best method of control for Himalayan balsam because its roots are weak and easily dug up. Removal should occur early in the season before plants go to seed. Plants can be hand-pulled or mowed. This process needs to be repeated each year for several years to ensure complete eradication, because seeds can remain viable for more than a year. Plants removed from a site should be transported in plastic bags to a waste management facility for incineration. In addition, it is imperative that native species be planted where invasive species were removed from to prevent future invasions.

GARDEN ALTERNATIVES

Try these plants in your garden as alternatives to Himalayan Balsam:

Fern-leaf bleedingheart (*Dicentra 'King of Hearts'*) is not native to PEI. However, it is commonly grown in Island gardens and sold at local greenhouses. It closely resembles Himalayan balsam with its delicate pink flowers. It has beautiful, fern-like, foliage that forms a robust clump, but will not take over your garden like Himalayan balsam.



Spotted Joe-Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*) is native to PEI. It can reach similar heights as Himalayan balsam. They also share a number of similar features, including similar shaped and arranged leaves, a reddish stem, pink flowers, and similar habitat.

Indian tobacco (*Lobelia inflata*) is native to PEI. It ranges in height from 15-100cm. The stems are covered in tiny hairs and the leaves are long with toothed edges. It produces violet flowers, with a faint patch of yellow on the inside, that bloom from mid-summer to fall. Indian tobacco has been used by herbalists to treat asthma.



How can you help?

Here are a few things you can do to help stop the introduction and spread of invasive species:

- Learn more about invasive species in PEI, including how to identify species of concern
- Choose native species whenever possible
- Carefully inspect and clean clothing, gear, animals, and vehicles before visiting a new natural area
- Never dump garden or pond waste in a natural area.
- When disposing of invasive species, they should be placed in a clear or dark plastic bag and taken to Island Waste Management for incineration
- Report a sighting

How to report:

If you think you have seen this invasive alien species on Prince Edward Island, please report your sighting to Island Nature Trust by phone or e-mail

Phone: (902) 892-7513

Email: intrust@eastlink.ca



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