

Himalayan Balsam

A close-up photograph of Himalayan Balsam flowers. The flowers are a vibrant pinkish-purple color and are arranged in clusters. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting foliage. The text is overlaid on the image.

Plant: Also called Poor Man's Orchid and Policeman's Helmet, this plant was introduced as an ornamental. Growing between 1-3m in height, the stems are hairless and leaves are serrated. Stems are hollow and have a purple tinge to them. Himalayan Balsam is an annual plant which only produces by seed.

Flowers: This flower is large and purple to pink in colour. The flowers occur in clusters of four or five. 700-800 seeds per medium plant are explosively released from seed pods when disturbed and can be flung as far as five metres from the parent plant. These seeds are viable underwater two years after release and even when completely soaked.

Where to Find This Weed: This plant prefers very moist soils and is frequently seen around rivers, lakes, ponds and marshes. The root system is very shallow which can lead to bank erosion, lowering the water quality of the nearby water body.