



# SET UP

- **PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BALSAM BASHING**
- **BALSAM BASH ROUTE MAP**
- **TAKING ACTION SAFELY GUIDE**
- **VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION FORM**
- **GET INVOLVED POSTER**

# Practical Guide to Himalayan Balsam Bashing 1 of 4

## Is this plant really a problem?

**Yes. Himalayan balsam is an Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS), now widespread across the UK's lowlands and regarded in many countries as a pest species. Natural Resources Wales list it in their 'top ten most destructive and costly invasive species' list.**

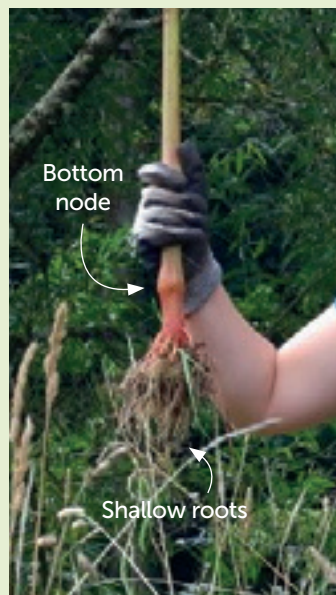
This INNS was introduced to the UK in 1839 and it spread by seeds being shared by the gardening and beekeeping community and via watercourses where seeds germinated in the muddy banks. A relative of the Busy Lizzie, this is our tallest annual plant, growing 2-3 metres high, with masses of sweet smelling pink flowers. It has the highest growth rate of any plant in the herb layer, easily out-growing native species to dominate an area in just one season. With the first autumn frosts the balsam dies back, leaving bare earth banks that are more erosion-prone, leading to habitat loss and the smothering of aquatic life. This plant grows happily in a range of conditions, but it really loves the moist, semi-shaded conditions found alongside watercourses and in damp woodlands. So, the River Wye's streams, wetlands and woodlands provide a perfect home!

**Under the Countryside & Wildlife Act it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause Himalayan balsam to grow in the wild. The seeds are classed as a controlled waste.**

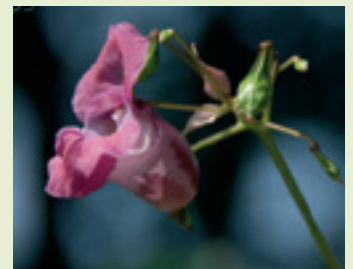
## How to recognise Himalayan balsam



Tall, reddish stems and masses of pink flowers



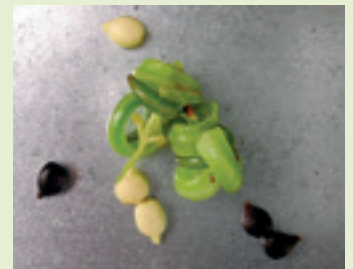
Seedlings



Flower and pod



Pointed leaves, 3 in a whorl



Seed pod, ripe (black) and unripe (white) seeds

## How is it so successful?

- Himalayan balsam has a long flowering season (June – October) and pollinators often favour balsam flowers over native flowering plants. Seeds are produced from July through to October.
- When touched, the seeds pods explode open, firing seeds up to seven metres in all directions! Each plant produces between 600 and 2,500 seeds, which are easily transported by water, by humans and wildlife.
- Seeds can survive for 2 years in the soil until the right conditions stimulate growth.
- Germination can occur on mass (synchronous), and it can be staggered over months (February – July).
- Balsam seedlings quickly outgrow and shade other plants which die from a lack of sunshine.
- Studies show Himalayan balsam may deplete soil mycorrhizae, preventing the regrowth of native plants.
- Predictions say climate change will bring more rainfall and floods, which will suit Himalayan balsam.

We can't afford to ignore it.

Fortunately Himalayan balsam is easy to pull up by the roots with a satisfying tug, and its seeds are only viable for around 2 years. So regular balsam bashing can halt its spread. If you spot Himalayan balsam in your garden or land, along a Public Right of Way or verge, do pull it up (as long as conditions are safe for you to do so) – see our tips below.

## A community spirit will be the key to getting rid of this pest plant.









If you see it growing in a neighbour's garden, gently point it out to them, explain the issues and offer to help them control it. If you know a local landowner who's struggling with controlling it, mobilise your friends and neighbours to help them. If you fancy bringing together your neighbours to balsam-bash along your local footpaths, bridleways or at a local site, then do get in touch with us. We can help your new group get up and running and ...

...do have a look at our Balsam Action Toolkit, designed for (and by) community action groups.



Available to download from [www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk](http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk) or contact us to request a hard copy

## Organising a Balsam Bashing Work Party

- 
**Choose a site** where action will make a difference - see next page. Get the landowner's support (have a look at the consent form sample within the Toolkit) and make sure the balsam can be accessed safely.
- 
**Complete your Risk Assessment (RA)** - ensure you've identified the hazards and how these can be controlled - a RA example is provided in our Toolkit.
- 
**Set the date and spread the word** - use posters (see example in the Toolkit) and social media to promote the work party. Invite your friends and neighbours and reach out to groups who might be interested e.g. WI, youth groups, transition groups.
- 
**Plan your day** - ensure you have the necessary tools, refreshments and treats and your biosecurity kit- see the kit list in our Toolkit. Don't over-work your volunteers; you want to make sure they'll join you again in future!
- 
**On the day**, lead your team - set out the structure of the day and communicate why balsam control is vital for wildlife. Let everyone know when to expect refreshment breaks. Run through your RA, highlighting the risks. If any tools are to be used explain their safe use and demonstrate the task (see below).
- 
**Record your activities**- Take before and after photos (a photo consent form example is included in the Toolkit) and record how much you've achieved. List any lessons learned to help improve future events. And do share your photos and news with us!
- 
**Follow biosecurity!** When you leave the site make sure everyone follows the biosecurity procedure (see below).
- 
**Care for your volunteers** - Thank everyone for their efforts and promote future work parties. If you can, celebrate achievements with social events, e.g. a barbecue.



'Balsam bashing' is the practice of manually pulling up balsam plants with roots, and/or cutting plants below the bottom node using scythes, slashers, brush-cutters or flails, to stop the plants forming seeds.

### Top Tips for successful Balsam Bashing

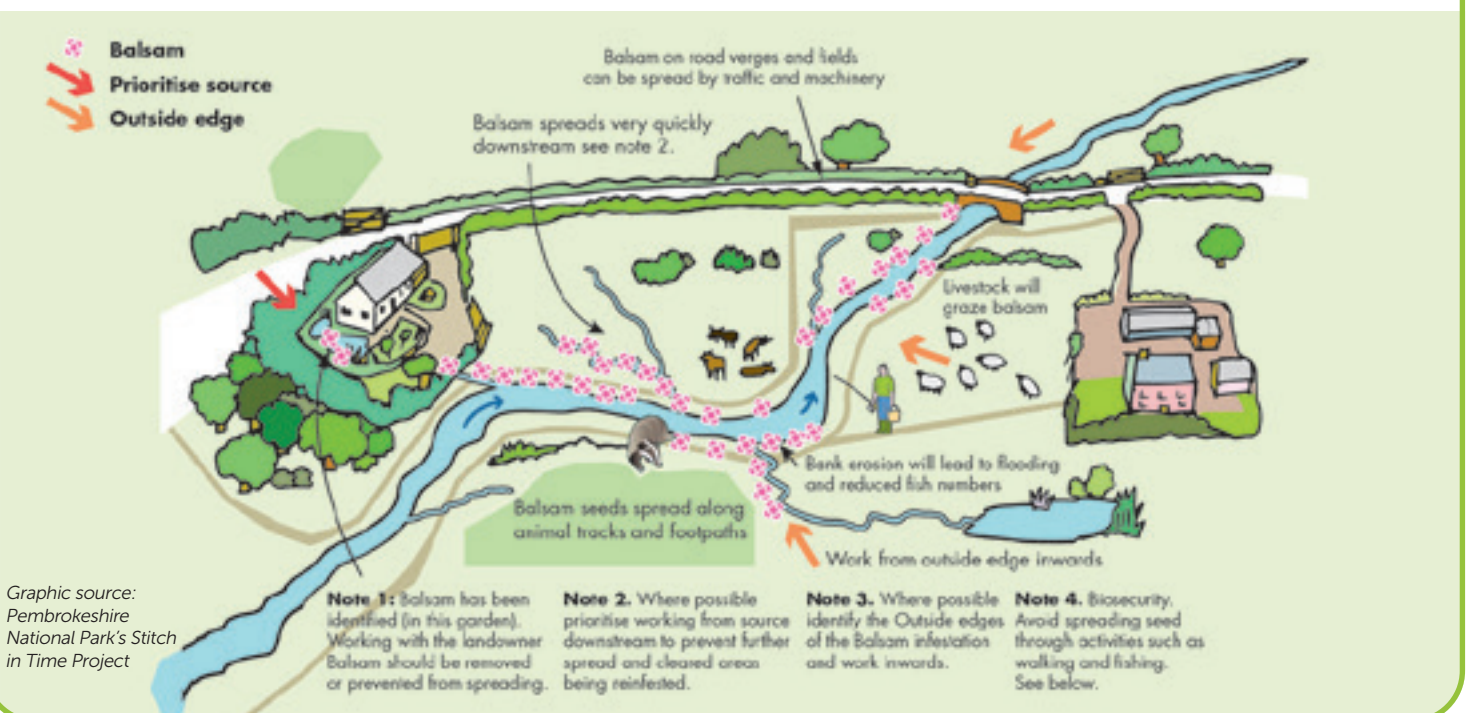
- ✓ Look around your local area and try to identify the source of balsam seed (likely to be the highest point upstream or highest point uphill) – see the diagram below.
- ✓ What3Words, the mobile phone app, is a useful tool to record sites (and do share those with us).
- ✓ Manual pulling is best carried out before the flowers appear (May) or at early flowering (June).
- ✓ If pulling during early flowering, first gently bend the flower and seed heads into a sturdy plastic bag and break them off into the bag. Keep bagged flowers and seeds on site to rot down for at least 3 years. It is illegal to take them off site except to a licensed controlled waste facility.
- ✓ The roots are rarely more than a few centimeters deep. Grasp the stem and lift the roots out with a gentle tug. If the stem snaps above the bottom node try again!
- ✓ Snap the stem of the pulled up plant between the root and the bottom node.
- ✓ If the site is large and too daunting for manual control use a slasher, scythe, flail or brushcutter, but cut below the bottom node to stop the plant

reshooting (if cut above the bottom node, plants go into overdrive, re-grow and produce lots of seed). Even one low cut in the first season will greatly reduce seed production, giving you a little time to plan how to deal with the area.

- ✓ Leave pulled plants piled up on the ground to rot down. However, if the site is damp the balsam might re-root from multiple nodes, so hang the plants over rocks or branches so they do dry out. Make sure the piles are well away from watercourses to prevent blocking. Check the piles after a couple of weeks to ensure no plants are rooting or flowering.
- ✓ Follow up work will be needed as the increase in sunshine can stimulate seedlings to sprout.
- ✓ Repeated monthly balsam bashing brings rapid success.



### Identifying the paths of spread is critical



Graphic source: Pembrokeshire National Park's Stitch in Time Project

## Communities up and down the Wye Valley are taking action.

### Will you join them?

Pulling or cutting one balsam plant before it flowers will reduce the seed-bank in the soil by 600 to 2,500 seeds. So, it really is the case that every little helps.

Fed up with seeing this pest plant expanding its range every summer, more and more local communities are taking action. Here are a few Wye Valley examples:

**Taking a catchment approach:** over 3 years, The North & District Footpath Group has mapped and methodically balsam-bashed across the Manor Brook catchment that feeds into the River Wye at Whitebrook. Areas that had become infested by balsam are once again havens for a diversity of wildlife, proving that this community-led catchment approach really does work.

**Saving important habitats:** over 4 days in 2021 Brockweir community (and neighbours) came together to stop the march of balsam through species rich meadows and woodlands, and to reclaim their stretch of the River Wye for wildlife. More than 3km of balsam was cleared. Plans are afoot to revisit those sites and extend work to new sites in the upper catchment.

**Reclaiming valuable amenity areas:** Upstream from the Wye Valley AONB, St James and Bartonsham Community Association have been working to raise awareness and increase levels of engagement along Hereford's riverbank, beginning with Bishop's Meadow and working upstream, while supporting Friends of Bartonsham Meadows in tackling the balsam in Bartonsham Meadows, floodplain meadows to the east of Hereford, where the Wye meanders between Victorian and Canary Bridges.

### Supporting local landowners and residents:

Llandogo Balsam Bashers plan to pull up balsam around their beautiful valleyside village, working from the most uphill infestations down towards the River Wye. They will be helping residents and landowners clear gardens, paths and fields of this pest.

If you'd like support in setting up a local action group or just organising a one-off balsam bash, do visit our website to download our Balsam Action Toolkit (written for (and by) local action groups) and please do get in touch to tell us what you're planning via [www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk](http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk)



Community-led balsam bashing at Brockweir

## Good biosecurity will ensure you don't become a spreader!

To ensure we're not personally contributing to the problem while we're enjoying the countryside, remember the mantra 'Check, Clean, Dry':

**CHECK**

**Check** your equipment, shoes and clothing for mud, aquatic animals or plant seeds and material. Remove anything you find and leave it at the site. A small brush, or better yet, a hoof pick is great for brushing off balsam seeds from shoes or tyre treads before moving into a non-infested area.

**CLEAN**

**Clean** everything thoroughly as soon as you can paying attention to areas that are damp or hard to access. Use hot water if you can.

**DRY**

**Dry** everything for as long as you can before using elsewhere as some invasive plants and animals can survive for over two weeks in damp conditions.

This guide forms part of the Balsam Action Toolkit created by the Wye Valley AONB Unit's Wye Invasive Species Project (WISP). Support has come from The North & District Footpath Group, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Wales Resilient Ecological Network (WaREN) and GB Non-Native Species Secretariat. The Wye Valley AONB unit has received funding for support for invasive species control through Severn Trent's *Boost for Biodiversity Fund*, National Heritage Lottery's *Nature Networks Fund* and Natural Resources Wales *Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience Fund*.

# Balsam Bash Route Map

This is the ideal scenario, so please don't worry if you can't complete all steps in time. With each plant pulled up you're stopping thousands more balsam plants from germinating, so it's more important to do what you can.

FEBRUARY

## Start calls to action

1. Check in with your volunteers
2. Invite new recruits, use social media, community notice boards, email etc.

Do check out the full Balsam Action Toolkit, which contains helpful tools like the landowner consent form, risk assessment, kit list, posters, volunteer sign-in sheets.

MARCH

## Choose a site

1. Contact the landowner and offer your group's support
  2. Obtain written consent to access their land to carry out balsam control
  3. Keep the landowner updated and supportive
  4. Check your site for protected designations e.g. SSSI or Nature Reserve and gain necessary permissions
- Visit <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/> for help with this

EARLY  
APRIL

## Plan your events

1. Check you have the right tools and kit (inc. Biosecurity and First Aid kit)
2. Check your volunteers are keen, willing and able
3. Check the logistics refreshments, travel long range weather forecast
4. Link to other environmental issues e.g. plastics, climate change

## Sort your admin

1. Update First Aid cover (if necessary)
2. Complete all safety assessments
3. Confirm dates, times and locations with your group

EARLY  
MAY

MID-LATE  
MAY  
(and repeat monthly for greatest effect)

## Big Balsam Bash!

1. Introduce yourself, set out the structure of the day, communicate why balsam control is vital for wildlife
2. Let everyone know when to expect refreshment breaks
3. Run through the Risk Assessment. If using tools, introduce the safety aspects
4. Record your activities photos, videos (make sure you have your volunteer's consent)
5. Follow Biosecurity procedure when everyone leaves the site
6. Thank everyone for their efforts
7. Promote future Big Balsam Bash events
8. Celebrate with a social event e.g BBQ
9. Share your successes and lessons learned with other groups

## Spread the word!

1. Use posters, flyers, social media to promote your event
2. Invite friends, family, neighbours
3. Reach out to other community groups (WI, DofE, Rotary, youth groups, Transition groups)



# Taking Action Safely

## For Local Action Groups

Health & safety, welfare and insurance is, for most, the less fun side of volunteering, but it really is a must to invest some time addressing these aspects before getting stuck into the practical outdoor work.

### The Government's Health & Safety Executive (HSE) says:

If you carry out volunteering, either as an individual or as part of a community group that has no employees then health and safety law will not normally apply to you. However, you should still carry out your role safely and follow any local government guidelines. For example, a community group of volunteers on a [Himalayan balsam pulling and] litter-picking exercise should check with their local authority if there are any restrictions, such as avoiding public highways.

Under the common law, voluntary organisations and individual volunteers have a duty of care to each other and others who may be affected by their activities. In some cases, people may sue you for damages using the civil law if they are injured as a result of negligence, for example a volunteer injuring a passer-by with a falling branch while carrying out tree maintenance.

## Health & Safety

Like many outdoor conservation activities, Himalayan balsam tasks can sometimes take you off the beaten track where the risk of an accident might be raised. With common law duty of care comes the responsibility to understand and communicate the health and safety aspects associated with your tasks. This Balsam Action Toolkit provides some forms to help you with this:

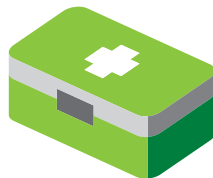
### A Risk Assessment Form

Help with identifying the hazards and risks associated with balsam tasks, and the measures to minimise risks and deal with emergencies. A completed example risk assessment is provided together with a blank working form that you're welcome to use.

### A Welfare Assessment Form

Help with addressing welfare aspects e.g. where to wash hands or go to the toilet during tasks. A completed example welfare assessment is provided together with a blank working form that you're welcome to use.

For safety, we recommend that at least one or more members of your group holds a relevant, up-to-date First Aid qualification.



Your local authority Volunteer Coordinator might be able to assist you with the training or the costs towards the training. Do get in touch with us and we can point you in their direction.

There's also a useful Kit List provided in the Balsam Action Toolkit to help you assemble everything you and your group might need for a successful and safe Balsam Bashing event.

### Public Liability Insurance

There's no law that says you must buy insurance for a voluntary or community event, but it is generally regarded as good practice and you might want to make sure you and your group is covered in case something goes wrong i.e. someone makes a claim for an injury sustained while volunteering with you.

#### The HSE says:

*Sometimes another body, perhaps a local council you have contact with or someone that you contract with (such as a landowner if the event is taking place on their land), will require you to have public liability insurance. If this is the case, you can ask why they are requiring this because it is not compulsory in law. Sometimes signing a disclaimer will be adequate instead of buying insurance.*

*If you are hiring equipment check with the company you are hiring it from whether their terms of hire include insurance and read any conditions carefully (particularly any exclusions). If external businesses are providing services, such as food, you should check they have their own insurance, and that it is in force on the day of the event.*

If you feel it best to have Public Liability Insurance, there are two avenues you can explore:

#### 1) Teaming up with existing local groups or your community/parish council

See if there are any local volunteer bureaus, community interest companies (CIC) or charities, local conservation or clean up groups, who might already have insurance cover for volunteer work. Ask if you could team up with them and be covered under their policy.

Some community / parish councils provide insurance for local volunteer footpath wardens, and they might be able to add your group to that policy if you help with some path maintenance, for example balsam pulling along local Public Rights of Way. Your county council Volunteer Officer might also be able to help you with this aspect, so do get in touch with us and we can point you in their direction.

#### 2) Taking out insurance for your own group

Here are two examples of organisations providing insurance for outdoor volunteer work:

- The Conservation Volunteers: If you are a member of the TCV's Community Network (it's easy to join and there are superb conservation resources you can then tap into) you can benefit from discounted insurance underwritten by Zurich. You will need to quote your TCV membership number when you call Zurich to get a quote. Otherwise Zurich offer an online package of insurance from £96 a year, but member discounts are not available for this package. It includes public liability, personal accident, employer liability, contents cover etc.
- Keep Wales Tidy: KWT runs a Community Group Insurance Scheme, which provides free basic insurance cover to groups formed and constituted in the last 12 months. For groups who have been in existence for longer than 12 months, KWT is asking for a contribution of £50/£35 towards the cost of the basic cover. They will be keen to see your group litter picking alongside your core conservation tasks.

#### We welcome your feedback!

We'd be interested to hear your experience with volunteer group health and safety and insurance matters so please do get in touch with us via our website Contact Us page [www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk](http://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk)

[www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/volunteers/volunteer-health-and-safety.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/volunteers/volunteer-health-and-safety.htm)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events#part-6-do-i-need-insurance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events#part-6-do-i-need-insurance)



# Volunteer Registration Form

## For Local Action Groups

LOCAL ACTION GROUP NAME: .....

### PART 1: PERSONAL DETAILS

FULL NAME: ..... TITLE: .....

ADDRESS: .....

..... POST CODE: .....

MOBILE TELEPHONE: ..... DAYTIME TELEPHONE: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

OCCUPATION: ..... DATE OF BIRTH: .....

To help us consider any appropriate adjustments required and to better support you, please give brief details of any disabilities or health concerns we need to know about, so we can discuss this with you. ....

### PART 2: ABOUT YOU

Background & Interests: .....  
Please give brief details. This can include your skills and experience, hobbies, interests and previous volunteering roles. ....

Why do you want to volunteer with this group, and what do you hope to gain from it? .....

### PART 3: EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

NAME: ..... RELATIONSHIP TO YOU: .....

ADDRESS: .....

..... CONTACT NUMBER: .....

### PART 4: DATA PROTECTION

The information that you have provided is required to administer your interest in volunteering with this local action group. It will be held securely on a volunteer database and in line with Data Protection Legislation.

Please tick the boxes if you are happy for the local action group to contact you:

By Email  By Phone  By Post

I declare that the information I have given is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true and complete.

SIGNED: ..... DATE: .....



# Fancy getting outside, making a difference for wildlife and making new friends?

Your local volunteer action group needs your help to get rid of Himalayan balsam around our beautiful local area.

*Himalayan balsam is an invasive non-native species that can smother our native plants, take over sensitive habitats and force out local wildlife.*

We are looking for volunteers to help us control this harmful species. So, if you have a couple of hours to spare and want to do something to help your local area, then please do get in touch.

*Full training in mapping and balsam pulling can be provided.*

**To register as a volunteer:**

Call: .....

On: .....

Email: .....

Or find us on Facebook: .....

