

Factsheet 5 INVASIVE SPECIES

(It is not yet required by law to report these plants if they are on private land. But if they become a nuisance you could be fined)

1. Japanese Knotweed

Japanese knotweed is a highly invasive, non-native plant. It is a vigorous, perennial that can cause damage to hard surfaces and engineered structures. As a consequence, it has far reaching economic implications for many industries.

Above-ground material **Red buds** begin to emerge from the base of the plant (the crown) during February-March. They develop into **shoots**, maintaining a reddish appearance with furled leaves. **Maturing stems** are hollow, somewhat like bamboo. They are green with **characteristic red speckles**. The canes grow rapidly through the spring and summer, reaching a height of 2-3 metres.

In spring, the newly expanded **leaves** are a yellowish green, becoming darker as they mature through summer. They alternate along the stem forming a **zigzag pattern**.

The plant flowers towards the end of the growing season (August-October), producing clusters of **small, creamy-white flowers** at the points where the leaves join the stem.

Towards the end of autumn, leaves begin to turn a yellowy-brown and eventually drop, revealing **feathered branches** from the remains of the flowers. **Hollow canes** shed the darker outer skin exposing a lighter, smooth cane that is quite **brittle**.

2. Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan Balsam is not a native species to the UK originating, as the name implies, in the Himalayas. The seeds of Himalayan Balsam are viable for up to two years and are commonly transported in waterways. The first indications that this would be a potentially invasive plant were the county Floras showing Himalayan Balsam tracing the line of waterways through the counties. Himalayan Balsam is tolerant of shade and it is now impossible to map the location of rivers using distribution maps of Himalayan Balsam because it has moved into woodland habitats and moist soils too.

Himalayan Balsam is the tallest annual plant in the UK growing up to 3 metres in height a year. It has highly visible pink flowers on fleshy hollow stems that are green in the spring but become red as the year progresses. The elliptical leaves and side branches arise in whorls of 3-5 from stem joints. A distinctive characteristic of the plant are the seed capsules which provide its alternative name? Touch-me-not? Balsam. The capsules open explosively when touched spreading the seeds up to 7 metres enabling the plant to colonise new areas. As an annual it has a very shallow root system, barely adequate for its tremendous height.

The problem

Each plant can produce up to 800 seeds. These are dispersed widely as the ripe seedpods shoot their seeds up to 7m (22ft) away.

The plant is spread by two principal means;

- The most widespread distribution tends to be by human means where individuals pass on seed to friends
- Once established in the catchment of a river the seeds, which can remain viable for two years, are transported further afield by water

