

# Balsam Bashing Event Pack

## About Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan Balsam is an annual plant which means it dies in winter and grows back each year from seed. Due to this the priority is to remove the plant before it sets seed which begins to happen from August. The plant has a very shallow root system so is easy to pull out by hand. In areas where there is permission to do so, strimming / mowing can be an effective method of removal.

In early spring before it develops nodes you can use a hoe to cut the stem of the plant. In all instances, the plant must be cut below the first node on the stem or else it will just grow back. A node in layman terms is a bump on the stem from which branches can grow.

## Planning your Event

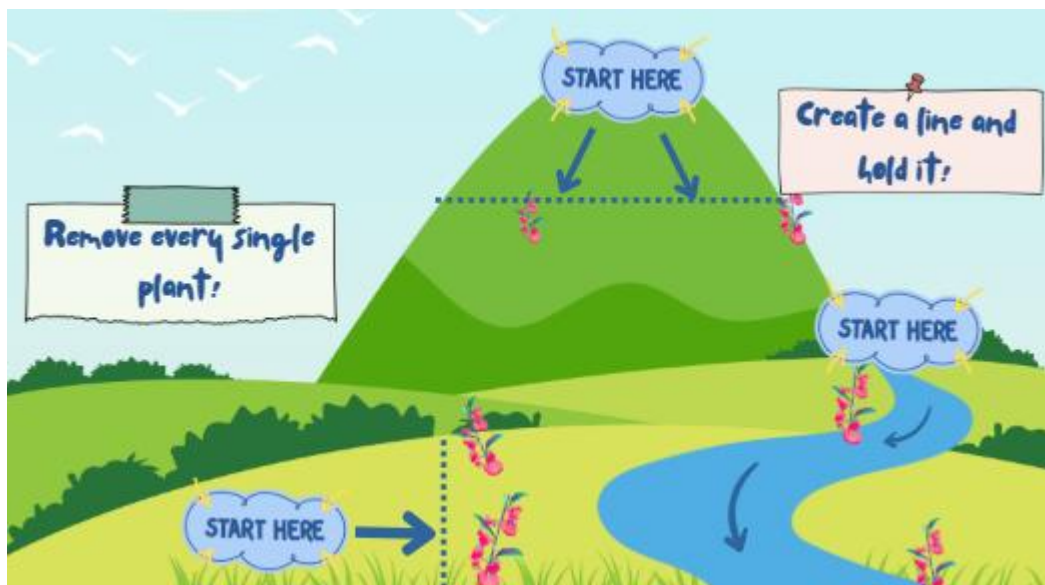
Before commencing Himalayan Balsam removal have a think about the best approach. We recommend utilising the following key principles.

### Map out your area

Assess where the balsam is and any natural boundaries you can use to divide up the area. We recommend starting in one area and clearing this methodically, before moving on to the next area. We recommend that once an area is clear, you return to ensure no new plants have emerged and to pick out any stragglers.

### Choose where best to start

If working inland, our principle is to push the Balsam back to source which means starting furthest away from where the Balsam has come from. Start at the furthest point away from the source and work methodically back towards it. Also take into consideration altitude. Seeds will fall downhill, so it may make more sense to start at the top of a hill and work down. On riverways / railways, start at the top and work down.



## Carryout a Safety Briefing

Volunteers should be briefed of any risks utilising the enclosed risk assessment and tick / giant hogweed factsheets. It is useful to do the briefing where the activity will start, as once briefed volunteers tend to like to get going straight away!

Ensure you have emergency contact details for any volunteers in attendance.

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## Explain the Why

A huge part of our project is increasing public awareness of the reason why we are removing Himalayan Balsam.

We tend to focus on two key issues:

- Biodiversity is essential to a healthy ecosystem. Balsam crowds out other plants and flowers which insects need to survive. If less insects survive there's less food for birds. This results in less birds which then impacts animals that predate birds like foxes. In areas where it takes over it creates a monoculture, negatively impacting the entire food chain.
- Because the plant dies back in winter it leaves the riverbank exposed. Balsam wipes out other plants with longer root systems which would have previously held the riverbank together. This can contribute to erosion and ultimately flooding.




## Balsam Event Kit List

1. Printed version of risk assessment / briefing information
2. Gardening gloves or work gloves suitable for handling brambles / nettles
3. Hoes / Rakes in early spring
4. Litter pickers for hard-to-reach areas
5. Suitable footwear for outdoors (woodlands / riverbeds)
6. Long sleeved tops and trousers (to protect from ticks, insect bites, nettles and brambles, giant hogweed)
7. Hi-Vis vests or jackets
8. First Aid Kit including tick remover or tweezers
9. Insect repellent spray
10. Antibacterial (bio-degradable) wipes and antibacterial hand gel
11. Bin bags / dog poo bags.
12. Bottles of drinking water.

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## How to Remove the Plant

Demonstrate the method for volunteers per the below.

<b>Step By Step Guide</b>	
1	<p>Grab the plant close to the base and pull it out of the ground.</p> 
2	<p>Snap the root off the plant below the first set of leaves / first node. This will ensure it cannot grow back.</p> 
3	<p>Pile the broken plants up to decompose (away from the pathways)</p> 

[How to get rid of Himalayan Balsam - Groundwork](#)

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## Using Tools

When organising volunteering days using the hand pulling method tends to be the most accessible and lowest risk approach to removing Himalayan Balsam. However, other methods and tools can be utilised depending on volunteer confidence / competence and in the case of power tools, where use of these tools is permitted. The most effective removal method varies on time of year.

**When seedlings first appear:** As soon as seedlings appear a hoe or square edge shovel can be used to cut the stems. In small areas plants can be smothered with untreated corrugated cardboard to suppress the growth. Where there is full sun (again in smaller areas) a clear plastic sheet can be used to cover seedlings. This is a process called solarization by which the seedlings perish due to being heated by the sun. Plastic should always be removed once this process has been completed.

**From May onwards (or once seedlings are tall enough):** Balsam can be pulled, slashed, scythed or strimmed (with permission). Participants should use their judgement to determine the right tool for the job and take all appropriate and necessary precautions. Weed slashers are the tool of choice for many balsam bashers, when cutting the plant using tools participants should cut as low to the ground as possible ideally below the first node.

**Notes on Strimming:** Strimming can only be undertaken in areas where permission is granted and with appropriate training, risk assessments and PPE. Strimming should never be undertaken where Japanese Knotweed or Giant Hogweed are present. This is because strimming Japanese Knotweed can cause it to spread and strimming Giant Hogweed can expose the strimmer to dangerous sap. Wherever possible areas cleared by strimming should be re-seeded with native wildflowers purchased from a reputable supplier.

**Chemical Control:** We never advocate the use of harmful chemicals or herbicides in the removal of Himalayan Balsam as it often does more harm than good when not administered with professional care.

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### Safe Working Principles (Risk Assessment)

Hazard	Action
<b>Changes in Weather and Exposure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check the weather ahead of time and wear appropriate clothing / sunscreen.</li> <li>• Ensure volunteers take breaks and have brought a drink.</li> </ul>
<b>Slippery and uneven surfaces (slips, trips and falls)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wear appropriate outdoor footwear.</li> <li>• Proceed with caution where ground is uneven or where there are trip hazards such as brambles or vines.</li> <li>• Avoid walking on slippery surfaces.</li> </ul>
<b>Obstacles and branches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful of your surroundings and avoid contact with low hanging branches</li> </ul>
<b>Contact with water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you come in contact with water notify the volunteer co-ordinator who will have hygiene equipment available.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Members of the Public / dogs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cease work whilst dogs or members of the public are passing and give them space.</li> </ul>
<b>Anti-Social Behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move away and alert the authorities if necessary.</li> </ul>
<b>Sharps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wear gloves in case of sharp objects hidden in the undergrowth.</li> <li>• Do not touch sharp objects.</li> <li>• Alert the volunteer group leader if sharp object is found.</li> </ul>
<b>Hygiene and potential contact with bio-hazardous materials (dog waste etc)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a visual assessment prior to reaching into undergrowth</li> <li>• Always wear gloves</li> <li>• If hazard is observed notify the volunteer group leader</li> <li>• Ensure antibacterial wipes / hand gel are available when there is no access to clean running water.</li> </ul>
<b>Bending and overstretching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take care when bending and do not overstretch or over-reach to pull out plants.</li> </ul>
<b>Stings, bites and dangerous plants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure long tops, long trousers and gloves are worn.</li> <li>• Warn volunteers about the risk of ticks and availability of tick removers</li> <li>• Wear insect repellent / DEET to deter biting insects such as horseflies.</li> <li>• Do not work in the vicinity of Giant Hogweed and brief on risks, how to ID and what to do if exposed.</li> </ul>
<b>Cuts and Abrasions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any cuts or abrasions should be cleaned and covered immediately.</li> </ul>
<b>Rakes and Hoes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid excessive force to prevent strain</li> <li>• Do not raise tools above elbow height</li> <li>• Store safely when not in use</li> </ul>

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<b>Bladed tools</b> <b>Loppers / secateurs / slashers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Always work away from the body (think about where the blade will go if it slips)</li><li>• Keep both feet on the ground and do not overstretch or overreach</li><li>• Be aware of your surroundings</li><li>• Don't cut branches directly above you, always attempt to approach from the side</li><li>• Store equipment safely when not in use</li><li>• If injury occurs seek immediate first aid.</li></ul>
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## Tick Fact Sheet

You may be exposed to ticks any time you are outdoors particularly in moist grassy areas such as woodlands, grasslands, moorlands, heathland and some urban parks. Ticks don't jump or fly, they wait on vegetation and attach themselves as you brush past. Ticks are mainly a risk to animals, but they do also sometimes attach to humans. Ticks can transmit microbes which can cause human diseases such as Lyme disease to develop. Ticks are very small and there are a number of different types in the United Kingdom.



## How to avoid Ticks

- walk on clearly defined paths to avoid brushing against vegetation
- wear light-coloured clothes so ticks can be spotted and brushed off
- use repellents such as DEET
- carry out a tick check (checking your body and clothes regularly for ticks both when outdoors and once you are home)

## Been bitten?

- If a tick has attached itself to your skin, alert your volunteer group leader.
- A tick remover or fine-tipped pair of tweezers should be included in the first aid kit.
- Using a tick remover or tweezers grasp the tick as close as possible to the skin and pull upwards slowly and firmly ensuring all parts of the insect are removed from the skin.
- Cleanse the area with antibacterial wash/soap and water.
- Contact your GP if you begin to feel unwell, have flu-like symptoms or develop a circular spreading rash.

**Tick attached to skin**



**Lyme disease bullseye rash**



**Tick found under hair**



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## Giant Hogweed Fact Sheet

Giant hogweed looks like an enormous cow parsley plant. They are often found along riverbeds. When it's fully grown, it can reach towering heights of between 1.5m to 5m and have a spread of between 1 and 2m. It forms a rosette of jagged, lobed leaves in the first year before sending up a flower spike in the second year and then setting seed.

### Risks

If the sap of the Giant Hogweed comes in contact with skin and is then exposed to sunlight this can trigger what is called phytotoxicity and result in blisters and burns.

Avoid contact with the plant and be extremely cautious in areas where there may be Giant Hogweed. If you are concerned you may have been exposed to the sap, cover the area immediately to prevent exposing the area to light. As immediately as possible wash the area thoroughly. Seek medical advice and do not expose the area to sun for a few days afterwards.

	<p><b>Stems</b></p> <p>Green and often with purple blotches and stiff, white, bristly hairs. Stems are hollow with ridges and have a thick circle of hairs at the base of each leaf stalk.</p>
	<p><b>Leaves</b></p> <p>Huge, up to 1.5m wide and 3m long, deeply divided into smaller leaflets. It looks a bit like a rhubarb leaf, with irregular and very sharp or jagged edges - which has given rise to one of its other common names - wild rhubarb. The underside of the leaf is hairy.</p>
	<p><b>Flowers</b></p> <p>Appear in June and July. They are small and white (or slightly pink) and are clustered on umbrella-like heads known as umbels that can reach a diameter of 60cm. All the flowers on the umbel face upwards.</p>

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## Identifying Himalayan Balsam

### Early Spring

Leaves are a round shape with a divert in the middle. They are often red at the base of the leaves. They can be seen growing amongst dry stems which are debris from the previous year's flowers. Stems are purple in appearance. If not successfully removed it comes back year after year from seed, so look to where it grew the previous year and there it will be again!



### Late Spring

Leaves have a serrated edge and grow in sets of three. Stems are hollow and fleshy inside, often if you snap them, they make a popping sound. Balsam is often the lightest colour plant in the area.



### Early Summer

Leaves remain as previous. Flowers are asymmetrical in appearance and may be pink, purple or white. They are a helmet / trumpet shaped.



Stems turn from green to more of a purple colour as the plant matures.

### Late Summer

The flower heads will begin to turn into green seedpods around the end of July. Seedheads which may pop quite dramatically if disturbed and send seeds flying everywhere!



The mature seeds are black and round, immature seeds are a beige colour.

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## Volunteer Form

<b>Volunteer Details</b>	
Volunteer Name	
Email Address	
Telephone Number	
Is this your first time removing Himalayan Balsam?	
Where and when did you first hear about the problems associated with Himalayan Balsam?	
<b>Emergency Contact Details</b>	
Name of Emergency Contact	
Relation to Contact	
Emergency Contact Telephone Number	
<b>Activities to be undertaken (tick all that apply)</b>	
Removal of Himalayan Balsam	
<b>Health and Safety</b>	
Do you have any medical issues which may impact you whilst volunteering?	
Do you have any allergies to insect bites / bee stings?	
<b>Data Protection Declaration</b>	
<p>I consent to the collection, use, and storage of my personal data by Balsam Bashing Ramsbottom for the purposes of communication, record-keeping, and coordination of volunteer activities. I understand that my data will be handled in accordance with the data protection regulations and will not be shared with third parties without my explicit consent.</p> <p>Volunteer Signature: _____</p>	
<b>Consent to be Photographed</b>	
<p>By signing below, I consent to being photographed and/or filmed during volunteer activities organized by Balsam Bashing Ramsbottom. I understand that these images and videos may be used for promotional purposes, including but not limited to social media, newsletters, and the organization's website.</p> <p>Volunteer Signature: _____</p>	