

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)



© John Barkla © usiaz © Paweł Ryszawa

ORIGIN: Central Asia (Himalayas)

INTRODUCED TO EUROPE: 1839

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS: A tall annual plant with a hollow, glabrous, jointed, fleshy stem. Leaves are opposite, in the upper part in whorls of three and are ovate to lanceolate with serrated margins. Leaf stalks bear several thick glandular hairs. Flowers are 2–4 cm wide, borne in racemes with purple or pink (sometimes almost white) petals. The two side petals are fused into a hood, the other three are single. Spur enlarged in the first part, tapering towards a narrow end. Fruits are capsules with multiple seeds. Ripe fruits split open, explosively discharging their seeds.

ECOLOGY/ HABITAT: Growing on river banks, ditches, shady sites on the edge of meadows, moist forests and floodplain areas.

STATUS: Widespread all over Europe but practically absent in the Mediterranean area.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Balfour's touch-me-not (*Impatiens balfourii*), another ornamental balsam species, is found increasingly often in nature. The flower is bi-coloured, with a lighter upper half and with a gradually tapering spur. Garden balsam (*Impatiens balsamina*) has a very narrow spur which is inflexed in its terminal section.