



Invasive Plants Guidance

There are many non-native invasive plants which may appear on development sites. The most common types are Himalayan balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed.

Himalayan Balsam

Himalayan or Indian Balsam is an invasive 'alien' species that grows in dense stands that suppresses the growth of native grasses and other flora. Each plant produces at least 500 seeds which are capable of being catapulted up to 7m away from the parent plant by the slightest disturbance of the seed pods.

Japanese Knotweed

Japanese Knotweed (JKW) is an invasive 'alien' weed and is able to spread from fragments of the plant as small as 10 mm.

The rhizome system can extend up to 7m away from the parent plant and 2m deep and is primarily responsible for the spread of the plant within sites with stands potentially spreading at a rate of several metres per year. The movement and use of soil contaminated by fragments of rhizomes is the primary method of spread between sites, however, the plant is also able to spread by transfer of cut stem material.



Himalayan Balsam



Japanese Knotweed



Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed can reach heights of 5 metres high with small, creamy-white flowers. The numerous flower umbels on each stalk can each measure up to 2 feet. It can easily be identified by its large size, spiked leaves and large flowering head.

Giant Hogweed is dangerous because its sap is harmful to humans through its ability to cause skin inflammations. The species is phototoxic, which means that if the skin comes into contact with the plant and then direct sunlight, it can cause a red rash, often followed by severe burns and blistering within 24 hours.

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Managing Invasive Plants

Areas where invasive plants are present must be clearly signposted and demarked to prevent unauthorised access (e.g. heras fencing). Their presence must be communicated to all relevant subcontractors to prevent unauthorised access to these areas.

Treatment Methods

Himalayan Balsam – hand pulling or herbicide

Control measures for Himalayan Balsam should aim to prevent seeding therefore stands of Himalayan Balsam should be sprayed with a glyphosate based herbicide or hand pulled around July when the plant begins to flower.

If spraying is the selected control method, this should only be undertaken on dry days with no wind to avoid drift to other species within the area.

Do not hand pull if the plant has set seed, this will cause the plant to spread.

Japanese Knotweed – herbicide, burial on-site, off-site removal

There are several ways to treat JKW and this depends on the speed of removal required and whether there are any other areas within the site that the JKW can be stored on or buried under.

- Herbicide treatment – can take 2 to 3 years
- Onsite burial – only allowed in England & Wales. Strict rules apply.
- Dig & dump - waste material from these plants is classed as 'controlled waste' and must be disposed of at a suitably licensed or permitted waste site.

To prevent cross contamination all hand held tools and boots must be washed prior to leaving the infected area. Plant must be jet washed before leaving the contaminated area with particular care taken with the tracks, buckets, wheel arches and tyre treads

Giant Hogweed – hand pulling or herbicide

It is recommended to apply herbicide early in the growth of this species, before the plant flowers and seeds. Chemical control needs to be consistent over a number of years to have any considerable effect.

To mitigate the risk of contamination and destruction of nearby plants, manual control and removal of Giant Hogweed is often favourable. Cutting the plant out from the roots is highly effective, but must be undertaken with extreme care by experienced professionals.

Cutting the plants themselves will often only encourage faster regrowth and more flowering shoots, and in some cases can help spread the plant's seeds even further. Strimming and trimming for cosmetic effect is not recommended.

Refer to EMS standard - Ecology & Biodiversity
Refer to EMS standard – Waste Management

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