

Policeman's Helmet

Invasive Species Alert Sheet

Regional Invasive Species Program

The spread of non-native invasive plants has serious ecological, economic and health impacts. Local governments and partners are asking for help from all residents to address **policeman's helmet** (*Impatiens glandulifera*) outbreaks on private property and public lands. Homeowners can manage this plant themselves or reach out to professionals for assistance.

This plant is native to the Himalayas and outbreaks in the capital region are primarily in riparian areas.

Why is policeman's helmet a problem?

- **Highly invasive**, especially in wetland and riparian areas. Rapidly forms dense stands that suppress other plants, creating bare patches under the plant canopy
- **Displaces native plants**, reduces biodiversity and alters wildlife habitat
- **Can contribute to flooding and erosion.**
- **Aggressively competes** with native species for pollinators, reducing the ability of native plants to set seed.

What does it look like?

- **Flowers:** pink to purple flowers (occasionally white), spurred and irregular, resembling a English policeman's helmet
- **Stems:** tall (2-3 m), succulent, reddish, smooth, bamboo-like and hollow, multi-branched with large swollen nodes and glands
- **Leaves:** large, 5- 18 cm long, simple, lance shaped, sharply toothed - opposite or whorls of three
- **Seeds:** large, black, usually 3-5mm long (up to 2500 per plant), ejected from mature fruit capsules spreading 3-5 m at the slightest touch
- **Roots:** 10-20 cm long and shallow
- **Could be confused with:** bamboos, knotweed species

Habitat and biology

- Grows in full sun, can tolerate shade and a wide variety of soil types, will grow taller in nitrogen-rich soils. Establishes dense stands.
- An annual in the balsam (Balsaminaceae) family
- Flowers from June to September, reproduces by abundant production of seeds that float, or are flung by the plant when touched. May be carried by humans, water, vehicles or animals. Can also regenerate from the crown and by root spread.
- Over **800 – 2500 seeds per plant** produced annually, seeds can remain viable in soil for at least 18 months



What to do if you spot a policeman's helmet plant:

- **Prevent spread:** don't buy, grow or trade this plant and brush/clean off seeds or fragments of plants from clothing, tires and equipment before leaving infested areas
- **Inform:** please report outbreaks to the contacts listed below for support and monitoring
- **Remove:** if you have properly identified policeman's helmet on your property, use the best control methods (below) to eliminate it
- **Monitor:** annually return to the site for several years to continue removal or monitoring
- **Replant:** after effectively eliminating this species over time, replant with appropriate native species

For small infestations (30 plants or less)

- **Manually remove** all plants and roots before flowering. Repeat twice per year if possible. If any plants remain, abundant seed production will continue the spread. Do not let flower heads form seeds.
- **Plan for proper disposal** (below).

For large infestations

- **Manually remove:** do this before flowering, dig or pull gently and try to avoid soil disturbance
- **Cut:** if unable to remove entire root, cut the plant/root about 3 cm below ground
- **Bag flowers/seeds:** if in flower or seed, carefully remove and bag flowers/seed heads and bag before digging
- **Clean before leaving:** to avoid further spread, wash/brush off footwear, vehicles and equipment before leaving site
- **Monitor:** return in spring and fall for a few years to monitor growth and remove new plants
- **Replant:** especially in disturbed areas, replant with non-invasive or native plants

Report large infestations (more than 25 plants) to the contacts on the teal bar below.



Policeman's Helmet



Policeman's helmet leaves

Proper disposal:

- The best option is to place all plant parts in garbage bags labelled "invasive species" and take to the Hartland Landfill.
- **Do not compost!** Flowers can still form viable seeds and rhizomes can continue to grow after removal.

CONTACT INFORMATION

P: 250.360.3302
E: invasive@crd.bc.ca
www.reportaweedbc.ca
www.crd.bc.ca/invasive

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