

# Toolbox Talk

## Dealing with Invasive Species



This is a basic guide to some of the most common invasive plant species that you are likely to come across on a canal site, and how to deal with them.

Some weeds can have potentially significant environmental consequences, while others pose a risk to agricultural land. Care also needs to be taken whilst handling these plants, as some can be harmful to humans.

### Himalayan Balsam

#### Key Facts:

- Purple flowering plant.
- Can grow to 3m high.
- Spread both by water and by an explosive seed head that can scatter seeds up to 7m.
- Grows in dense patches preventing growth of native plants.
- Dies back in the autumn leaving bare ground liable to erosion.

The most flexible method of controlling Himalayan Balsam is pulling by hand, which can be done at any time but ideally before the plants set seed. Balsam can also be cut manually or with a strimmer at the start of its flowering season in June but not before as this will cause vigorous regrowth. Plants should be disposed of by burning, or by composting if seeds are not present. Control methods need to be repeated for a minimum of three years to have any chance of eradicating the plant.



### Japanese Knotweed

#### Key Facts:

- Most common of 3 similar species of invasive knotweed found in the UK.
- Root system of each plant reaches more than 3m deep and can spread at least 7m across.

Controlling knotweed by cutting is possible, but probably not effective on most of our sites as it needs to be extremely accurate and repeated every 2-4 weeks during the growing season for a number of years.

The most effective method of control is by using industrial herbicides, which should only be undertaken by suitably qualified persons. The knotweed code of practice provides further information on effective control of these plants and can be found via the Environment Agency Website.



### Giant Hogweed

#### Key Facts:

- Can reach up to 5m in height
- Produces up to 50,000 seeds
- Shades out native plants and causes soil erosion if found in dense patches.
- **Contains poisonous sap** that causes painful blistering & severe skin irritation that can last for 6 years.

Due to the poisonous sap, strimming should be avoided and extra care should be taken when handling the plant—long trousers, long sleeves and thick gloves are recommended. The most effective method of control is by chemical treatment by a suitably qualified person, but regular cutting or digging can also work. Whichever method is chosen, it must be repeated for up to 10 years to be effective. Plants can be disposed of at landfill or by composting on site.

