

OCTOBER 2011

STEVE'S

# Weed of the Month

## Policeman's Helmet

**Also Known As:** Himalayan balsam, poor man's helmet, Indian balsam, ornamental jewelweed

**Policeman's Helmet** is a **Class B Noxious Weed**. Non-native species that are either absent from or limited in distribution in some portions of the state but very abundant in other areas. The goals are to **contain** the plants where they are already widespread and **prevent** their spread into new areas.

**Policeman's helmet, (*Impatiens glandulifera*) Royle**, Native to India and the western Himalayas, is an annual of riparian areas that reproduces entirely by seed. It has a shallow, fibrous root system, but adventitious roots from the lower stems provide some buttressing. This herbaceous plant is succulent and glabrous (smooth and hairless). Growing 3–10 feet tall, the plant's upright stems are multi-branched, hollow, and bamboo-like with a purplish tinge. The leaves occur opposite or in whorls of 3; they are stalked, lance-shaped or elliptic (egg-shaped) with pointed tips and rounded bases, and have sharply serrated edges. Policeman's helmet typically produces flowers from early summer to early fall. The spurred, 5-parted flowers are predominantly pink to purple (sometimes white) and resemble an old-fashioned English policeman's helmet. The upper petal forms a hood over the reproductive structures (forming the helmet) and the lower petals form a platform for landing insects. The fruit is a 5-chambered capsule; when disturbed, the mature seedpod splits and eject seeds up to 20 feet, giving rise to the *impatiens* family motto of "touch me not." A single plant can produce over 800 seeds, which can be viable for 18 months or longer and can even germinate under water. The plant often grows along streams and ditches and the water current is able to carry the seeds great distances.



Photo by: Barbara Tokarska-Guzik,  
University of Selesia, Bugwood.org

Policeman's helmet prefers moist, rich soil and grows in full sun as well as in partial shade. It grows particularly well in lowland riparian areas, including along stream sides and in moist forests, wetlands, and roadside thickets. Policeman's helmet is extremely invasive to moist, natural areas and produces dense stands that shade out competing native vegetation.



Photos by: Jan Samanek, State Phytosanitary Administration, Bugwood.org

Photo by: Michael Shephard, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Photo by: Tom Heutte, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

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## Control Methods

Policeman's helmet is sometimes sold as an ornamental, so avoid buying or planting this invasive species. Any control work on infested stands must be done before flowering to avoid seed spread. Otherwise, the flower head clusters should be carefully bagged and removed to prevent seeds from escaping. Destroyed plants can be incinerated, but this must be done properly to prevent new plant growth. In any and all cases, the site should be regularly monitored for several years so that any new seedlings or plants can be immediately tended to.

**Cultural Control:** Planting and maintaining a competitive plant species (preferably native) can inhibit policeman's helmet from invading or re-invading a site.

**Physical/Mechanical Control:** An annual with a shallow root system, policeman's helmet can be easily and effectively controlled by pulling or digging it out, preferably in the spring or early summer when the soil is moist for easy removal of the entire root system and before seed pods have developed. If the plants are located along a water way, measures may have to be taken to prevent vegetative debris from entering the water system. Repeated mowing can be effective, but may be difficult considering the riparian habitats where policeman's helmet is often found. Manually-operated brush-cutting tools can be used to cut the plants off at ground level; while this control method can cause less disturbance, it or another control measure must be used on new growth.

**More information can be found in the  
PNW Weed Management Handbook**

**Use pesticides with care.** Apply them only to plants, animals, or sites listed on the label. When mixing and applying pesticides, follow all label precautions to protect yourself and others around you. It is a violation of the law to disregard label directions. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

**Chemical Control:** Herbicides are often the best control option for large infestations of policeman's helmet and should be carefully selected and applied depending on plant growth stage and location. Special permits are required in order to apply herbicides to aquatic sites in Washington. Herbicides with 2,4-D, glyphosate and triclopyr have been effectively used for control of policeman's helmet.

**Biological Control:** No biological control agents are available. Cattle and sheep reportedly graze policeman's helmet.

**Questions:** contact [Steve Van Vleet](#) or phone (509) 397 – 6290