

Problem Plants

Plants which have been introduced from other parts of the world can become invasive – outcompeting our native flora and becoming a problem. Here are a few you might see while out on the riverbanks.

For detailed guides, visit the [GB Non Native Secretariat website](#)



Himalayan Balsam

Originally introduced from India, **Himalayan Balsam** has spread rapidly along our river banks, reducing biodiversity and increasing bank erosion due to its very shallow roots and its lack of growth in the winter leaving banks bare and exposed.

Recognise it: by its pink-purple flowers, fleshy stem and characteristic serrated-edged leaves

Important note: DO NOT touch the flower heads when the seed pods have formed. That's how it spreads!

Japanese Knotweed is highly invasive and dominates native wildlife. It increases river bank erosion, and can seriously damage buildings as it is tough enough to grow through concrete!

Recognise it: by its flat-based leaves in an alternating pattern and forming zig zag shaped branches. Stems are a speckled purple colour.

Important note: Japanese Knotweed can be spread by the movement of a tiny fragment – if you see it, DO NOT try to remove it!



Japanese Knotweed

Giant Hogweed out-competes native Flora which can lead to bank erosion and increases flood risk. It also causes serious burns to the skin.

Recognise it: mainly by its size - it can grow to 5m tall! It has white, umbrella-shaped flowers and sharply divided leaves up to 3m wide.

Important note: Even minute amounts of sap can cause burns to the skin - DO NOT touch!



Giant hogweed

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Skunk Cabbage

Skunk cabbage likes wet sites so will often be found along river banks, in woodlands and wetlands. The plant spreads over tens of metres which can result in a dense layer of the plant outcompeting native species and decreasing biodiversity.

Recognise it: by its distinctive flower during March and May and its tobacco-like green leaves during the rest of the year. The American species has yellow flower and Asian has white.

Curly Waterweed overwhelms ponds, outcompetes native vegetation and chokes up waterways, exacerbating flood risk. It is still widely sold as an aquarium and garden pond plant and the UK population is most likely due to deliberate or accidental release.

Recognise it: by its strongly curled leaves which grow in a spiral around the stem.



Curly Waterweed

Floating Pennywort is an ever growing issue in the South West as it grows quickly, changing the availability of oxygen in the water threatening aquatic wildlife and outcompeting native plants.

Recognise it: by its fleshy stems and bluntly-toothed leaves. Often on the surface of the water.



Floating Pennywort

Tips:

- As a general rule, don't touch invasive plant species. They can be easily spread and are sometimes damaging to our health.
- The information in this guide has been sourced from the [GB Non Native Secretariat website](#). Here you can find information on the identification of a wide range of invasive non-native species.