

Marshes Balsam Bash  
Sunday 7th June 2015 10 a.m.

On the sunny morning of this year's Ickenham 5 Mile Race from Swakeleys Park and around the village, a group of intrepid gardeners headed in the opposite direction and hit Ickenham Marshes with only their gloves and long sleeves as tools against the encroaching Himalayan Balsam growing amongst the nettles along the banks of the Yeading Brook.



Sadly, reports are that Himalayan balsam has spread through Ickenham, where it's a very pretty (if tall!) addition to gardens during the summer months, but dies back in autumn leaving bare patches where it's throttled the growth of everything except nettles and brambles.

This year's party were pleased to see that last year's efforts had not been in vain, with the section of the Brook cleared last year still being relatively free of balsam.

Tackling the balsam in two groups, our intrepid gardeners (including representatives from the Society, from Ickenham Marshes Partnership and from Friends of the Earth) "weeded" a wide track that had been cleared of high growth and was now filling up with balsam seedlings.



Pulling up balsam is quite easy to do, because of its lightweight thick stems and shallow roots.



The more energetic went wild cutting down very tall balsam on the Yeading



Brook banks further upstream.

Further information about Himalayan balsam can be found on the RHS website <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=480> If you find Himalayan balsam in your garden, you may like to consider cutting it down or pulling it up before it flowers.

Although the flowers of this Busy Lizzie relative are very pretty, each plant can produce up to 800 seeds, which are dispersed widely as the seed pods shoot their seeds up to 7 metres away. Seeds remain viable for two years. For further information about the special rules applying to land affected by Himalayan balsam and its disposal, please refer to Government guidance <https://www.gov.uk/prevent-the-spread-of-harmful-invasive-and-non-native-plants>

PICTURES:

Himalayan balsam clogging the banks of Yeading Brook on Ickenham Marsh

Weeding a track to remove Himalayan balsam seedlings

The shallow roots of Himalayan balsam

Chris Mountain of Ickenham Marshes Partnership picks a Himalayan balsam specimen