



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226  
(360) 354-3990 [www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pubwks/noxious/noxious/htm](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pubwks/noxious/noxious/htm)

## POLICEMAN'S HELMET

*Impatiens glandulifera*

**THREAT:** A native of Asia, policeman's helmet, also called poor man's orchid, is a plant of moist areas and riparian zones. It was probably introduced into the United States as a garden ornamental. In Britain, it is considered extremely invasive and is one of the "top 20" non-native weeds. As this plant often grows along streams and ditches, seeds can be quickly spread downstream by water. A single plant can produce up to 800 seeds, which are viable for 18 months or more, and the seeds can even germinate under water.

**DESCRIPTION:** Policeman's helmet is an annual, which germinates in February to March, and flowers from June to October. The plant can grow up to 10 feet tall. The stems are hollow and the leaves are oblong to egg-shaped, with serrated edges. The flowers range in color from white to pink to purple and the shape resembles an old-fashioned English policeman's helmet. When touched, the mature seedpod splits and ejects its seeds up to 20 feet. This habit has earned other related *Impatiens* the name of touch-me-not, and inspired the following lines, written by Erasmus Darwin in 1789.

*With fierce distracted eye Impatiens stands  
Swells her pale cheeks and brandishes her hands,  
With rage and hate the astonished groves alarms  
And hurls her infants from her frantic arms.*

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Policeman's Helmet can be controlled with herbicides or by mechanical means. Plants can be easily pulled and this is quite effective for all but very large infestations. Contact the Weed Control Board for site-specific control recommendations.

