



FACT SHEET

POLICEMAN'S HELMET

(also known as POOR MAN'S ORCHID)

(*Impatiens glandulifera*)

- Policeman's helmet grows up to 10 feet tall.
- The stems are hollow and bamboo-like with a purplish tinge.
- The leaves are oval with serrated edges.
- The flowers, which bloom from June to October, range in color from white to pink to purple, and the shape resembles an old-fashioned English policeman's helmet. (Or an orchid; an alternative common name is "Poor Man's Orchid.")
- The mature seeds eject up to 20 feet from the seed pod when touched or disturbed.
- Touch-me-not family



DISTRIBUTION:

Policeman's helmet has been seen in several locations throughout Jefferson County, mostly in Port Townsend. It was widely sold in the county prior to 1999, when it was added to the Noxious Weed List.

WHY BE CONCERNED?

- Policeman's helmet is extremely invasive; it grows particularly well in moist, riparian or wetland areas where it can out-compete native vegetation.
- Because it is an annual, it dies down in the winter, leaving no food or habitat for wildlife.

**Policeman's helmet is a Class B designate weed.
Control is required in Jefferson County.**

ECOLOGY:

- Policeman's helmet requires high soil moisture, and will grow in partial shade.
- An annual, it reproduces entirely by seed.
- One plant can produce up to 800 seeds; when the seedpod is mature it splits, ejecting seeds up to 20 feet. The seeds travel along waterways and can germinate under water; they remain viable for 18 months or more.

CONTROL

Prevention and early detection are the best means of control.

- **Do not buy** or plant policeman's helmet.
- **Avoid** introducing soil or gravel from areas known to have policeman's helmet.
- **Remove** seedlings when young because they can usually be pulled easily, and they have not had an opportunity to reproduce.
- **Replant** newly weeded area with a desirable (preferably native) plant species, to discourage reinfestation.
- **Dispose** of weeds properly, carefully bag seed pods and dispose of them in the trash.
- **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

HANDPULLING is effective, because policeman's helmet is an annual with a shallow root system. Seeds present in the soil will continue to germinate for up to two years, so the site should be monitored and seedlings removed.

MOWING or brush-cutting are not very effective means of control, but could be used on large infestations to prevent seed production. However, mowed or cut plants can resprout so follow-up treatment of some kind is necessary.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL: It is reported that sheep and cattle graze the whole plant in Britain.

HERBICIDES can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying a herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount.

- **Note:** Most herbicides will **NOT** prevent germination of weed seeds already in the soil, so monitoring and retreatment are necessary.

Call the Weed Board for specific herbicide advice.