Common species to identify in the field

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Contents

1 Common species to identify in the field

1.1 Legislation

The full EU list of invasive alien species can be found here: eu-listade-invasiva-frammande-arter-vaxter.pdf

It is prohibited to import, sell, exchange, cultivate, transport, use, or keep live specimens of these species.

For a species to be considered present in Sweden, a finding confirmed by the authorities is required. That a species occurs sporadically may mean that it has occurred but has been controlled, or that it appears in the country from time to time. Below is a selection of examples of invasive plants that are commonly encountered in the field. This is not a complete list – all relevant species under the legislation must always be checked.

From 15 May 2026, a Swedish national list will also apply: Sweden's first national list of invasive alien species - News - Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management This includes a total of 34 species; 25 aquatic species and 9 terrestrial species. This appendix covers the 9 terrestrial species; if work is to be carried out near or in water, the aquatic species must also be considered during planning and preparation.

1.2 Method catalogue and guidance

Guidance documents are available on the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's website, along with links to, for example, the Method catalogue, which describes proposed methods for different types of control of invasive plants.

1.3 EU-listed invasive species established in Sweden

Giant hogweed

Giant hogweed is a large plant with white flowers. A single plant can grow up to 5 m tall. The stem is often reddish-brown and blotched; it is also hollow and hairy with clearly longitudinal ridges. The leaf lobes are long and narrow with sharply pointed, doubly serrated teeth. The flower umbels are about 50 cm wide with sharply lobed bracts, which in some cases can reach about 3 m. Giant hogweed is now commonly found in large parts of southern Sweden and is often found near urban areas or roads and railways. The species also occurs in some places in Norrland near Luleå and the Pite Lapland area (Arjeplog, Arvidsjaur and Malå).

In addition to being a threat to biodiversity, this species is also a health hazard in the field. The plant sap, in combination with sunlight, can cause burns or severe blistering on the skin. It is therefore important to wear protective clothing and safety glasses when handling it in the field.

Image source: Giant hogweed, Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2021 (Giant hogweed (naturvardsverket.se))

Japanese knotweed

Since 7 August 2025, Japanese knotweed, giant knotweed and Bohemian knotweed have been included on the EU list of invasive alien species of Union concern. This means that it is prohibited to possess, import, sell, cultivate, transport, use, exchange, or release these species into the environment.

Japanese knotweed is a large plant that can grow up to 250 cm tall. The stem is thick and hollow and is light green or reddish-brown in colour and somewhat woody. The leaves are broadly oval, hairless, and vary in size from 5-15 cm. During flowering (September-October), the species has white or pink flowers growing in clusters directly adjacent to the leaves.

Japanese knotweed has negative effects on ecosystem services. Areas can become completely overgrown and land use becomes restricted; it may no longer be possible to walk through areas and gardens may no longer be cultivated.

The strong roots can also penetrate buildings and water pipes, but in Sweden this is still uncommon. The problem may mainly arise in older buildings where cracks and cavities already exist for Japanese knotweed to enter through.

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency recommends carefully planning any control of Japanese knotweed and handling it with great caution. Incorrect handling or control may lead to increased spread. Japanese knotweed fact sheet (in Swedish).

Image source: Japanese knotweed - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Image source: *Japanese knotweed, Nacka Municipality 2021 (*Japanese knotweed | Nacka Municipality)

Japanese knotweed can easily be confused with giant knotweed. Giant knotweed is larger, has a thicker stem and larger leaves with a heart-shaped leaf base. There is also a hybrid between these two species – Bohemian knotweed. All three are classified as invasive alien plants.

Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam can grow up to 2.5 metres tall and has thick, often reddish stems and serrated leaves. The flowers are usually pink but can also be white, and grow in small hanging clusters. The species grows mainly in moist, nutrient-rich, open to semi-open environments, for example along watercourses, in swamp forests, on clear-cuts, ruderal land and in parks, often together with other tall species such as stinging nettle and rosebay willowherb.

Himalayan balsam is distributed across large parts of Sweden and has existed in naturalised populations since the beginning of the 20th century. It is very common in almost the entire country, except in the inland parts of Norrland. It is regarded as one of the most problematic invasive plants because it can form dense stands and spread over long distances.

Himalayan balsam flowers during the summer, and each plant can produce hundreds of seeds. The fruits burst open explosively when touched and spread seeds several metres, while longer-distance spread occurs via water and human activity, for example through soil masses and vehicles. Dense stands outcompete other plants and negatively affect both pollination and the nutrient balance of the soil. To prevent spread, the plant should be controlled before seed set, and plant material must be handled so that seeds are not spread further.

Image source: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Himalayan balsam

1.4 Sweden's national list of invasive species – terrestrial species

Garden lupin

Garden lupin can grow up to 120 cm tall, and the leaves have long petioles with 9-18 lance-shaped leaflets that are 7-15 cm long and 1-2 cm wide. The flowers are borne in long racemes 6-40 cm in length and may have up to 200 flowers. The colour varies, but the most common colours are blue and pink, and in some cases white and purple flowers also occur. The species is found mainly along Swedish roads and railway embankments, but in some cases also on ruderal land and residential plots.

Garden lupin flowers in June-July, and the flowers are arranged in dense terminal clusters on a tall spike. Each plant can produce several hundred seeds, which are also long-lived. The seeds are then spread over longer distances by watercourses and many forms of human activity. It has a relatively short generation time and a persistent seed bank, which means it spreads quickly and can return after a long time.

Image source: Garden lupin - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Sand lupin

Sand lupin can grow to 50-100 cm in height, and the leaves have blunt leaflets that are about 5-10 cm long. The flowers are light blue to dark blue with elements of white or reddish-violet. The species is found in open urban environments, mainly along roads, road verges and roadside ditches, but also along railways, in gravel pits, property boundaries, ski slopes, waste heaps and other ruderal land. Individual occurrences have been reported from more natural environments such as freshwater shores, mountain birch forest and pine forest.

Areas with many reported known populations include south-western Småland, north of Timrå, around Umeå, along the 120 km stretch of European route E12 between Umfors and Storuman in Lycksele Lapland/Västerbotten County, Gällivare and north of Pajala.

Sand lupin flowers in May-June, and the flowers are arranged in dense terminal clusters on a tall spike. Each plant can produce several hundred seeds, which are also long-lived. The seeds are then spread over longer distances by watercourses, many forms of human activity, road machinery and birds.

Image source: Sand lupin - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Rugosa rose

Rugosa rose is a vigorously growing, densely branched and very thorny rose that can grow more than two metres tall. It has large white to dark pink flowers and characteristic large, flattened rose hips. The leaves are thick and wrinkled, dark green and glossy on the upper side and hairy on the underside. The thorns are straight, of varying lengths and often have a downy base, making the shrub difficult to pass through.

The species spreads very effectively both by seed and vegetatively. The rose hips are spread mainly by birds and water and float very well in both fresh and salt water. Even damaged fruits and seeds can continue to spread over long distances.

Rugosa rose originates from north-eastern Asia and was introduced to Europe in the late 18th century. In Sweden it was long used as an ornamental plant and to stabilise sand along beaches. Since the beginning of the 20th century it has become naturalised and is now found throughout the country. The species poses a major threat to biodiversity, especially in sensitive coastal and dune environments, where it outcompetes native species and alters natural ecosystems.

Image source: Rugosa rose - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Clarification for private individuals who have rugosa rose in their garden/land:

From 15 May 2026, the species is included on the national list of invasive alien species. This means that it is prohibited to import, transport and trade in the species. The prohibitions do not apply to seed-sterile hybrids with rugosa rose, ***Rosa rugosa****.* ***Private landowners and holders of rights of use are not subject to an eradication obligation for existing occurrences****, but for government agencies, municipalities and regions the same rules apply as for the species listed on the EU list.* ***However, all landowners and holders of rights of use must take the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the species from their own property.***

Canadian goldenrod

Canadian goldenrod is a perennial, fast-growing, colony-forming herb that can grow up to two metres tall. It has a stiffly upright, usually hairy stem and narrowly lance-shaped leaves with serrated margins. At the top, dense pyramidal panicles are formed with many small bright yellow flower heads. Flowering takes place late in the season, from August to October, and the fruits are equipped with a pappus that makes them adapted to wind dispersal. The species may be confused with other goldenrod species, especially late goldenrod and the native goldenrod.

The species is highly adaptable and can grow in a range of environments, from moist areas to dry land. It readily establishes in abandoned fields, roadsides, railway embankments, meadows and drained wetlands. It spreads effectively both through wind-dispersed seeds and through rhizomes, and its roots also release chemical substances that inhibit the growth of other plants.

Image source: Canadian goldenrod - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Late goldenrod

Late goldenrod is a perennial, fast-growing, colony-forming herb that can grow up to 2-3 metres tall. It has a stiffly upright, smooth stem and narrowly lance-shaped leaves with serrated margins. At the top, dense cone-shaped or pyramidal panicles are formed with many small bright yellow flower heads. Flowering takes place late in the season, from September to October, and the fruits are equipped with a pappus that makes them adapted to wind dispersal. The species may be confused with other goldenrod species, especially Canadian goldenrod and the native goldenrod.

In its native range, late goldenrod grows mainly along forest edges, roadsides, railway embankments and in abandoned fields. In Sweden it occurs mainly in southern and central Sweden and along the Norrland coast, and it spreads where human activity has taken place, for example along roadsides, railway embankments and construction sites.

Late goldenrod can form dense, tall stands that effectively outcompete native species. It does not spread quite as strongly by seed as its relative Canadian goldenrod, but has a greater vegetative spread potential through its longer and more persistent rhizomes. Rhizome fragments broken off through, for example, digging are very viable and readily form new plants.

Image source: Late goldenrod - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Caucasian stonecrop

Caucasian stonecrop is a low-growing perennial plant that reaches approximately 7-15 cm in height. It is characterised by creeping stems along the ground and upright flowering stems. The flowers are pink to rosy violet, 1-1.5 cm wide, and consist of five petals. The leaves are fleshy, oval and green all year round, making the plant easy to recognise even outside the flowering period.

The species occurs naturally on coastal cliffs, in stony and calcareous environments and on other open ground, but is also common in urban and human-affected areas. Caucasian stonecrop is very tolerant of sun, wind and salt, which contributes to its success in exposed environments. In Sweden, the species occurs throughout the country, but is most common in the central and southern parts. Flowering usually takes place in May-June.

Caucasian stonecrop forms dense, continuous mats that remain year-round, giving the species a strong competitive advantage over other plants. It spreads mainly by seed and root shoots, but also through soil masses and tools used during removal. Once the plant is established, it can quickly spread over large areas. Contact with the plant may also cause irritation to skin and mucous membranes, which is important to consider during handling and control.

Image source: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency Caucasian stonecrop

The species Caucasian stonecrop is covered by a specific exemption from the prohibitions in Chapter 3, Section 1 of the Ordinance on Invasive Alien Species. The exemption means that the prohibitions do not apply to specimens of Caucasian stonecrop, Phedimus spurius, and Siberian stonecrop, Phedimus hybridus, that are used or are to be used on sedum or vegetation roofs, provided that the roofs were constructed before or no later than three years after the species was added to the national list.

Private landowners and holders of rights of use are not subject to an eradication obligation, but for government agencies, municipalities and regions the same rules apply as for the species listed on the EU list. However, private landowners and holders of rights of use must also take the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the species from their own property, if, in their capacity as property owners or holders of rights of use, they have the right to take such measures.

Siberian stonecrop

Siberian stonecrop is a perennial plant that reaches approximately 10-20 cm in height. It is characterised by stems that grow along the ground and upright stems that bear flowers. The flowers are yellow and consist of petals about 0.8-1 cm long. The leaves are fleshy, blunt and green all year round.

The species occurs naturally on coastal cliffs, in stony and calcareous environments and on other open ground, but is also common in urban and human-affected areas. Siberian stonecrop is very tolerant of sun, wind and salt, which contributes to its success in exposed environments. In Sweden, the species occurs throughout the country, but is most common in the central and southern parts.

Image source: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency Siberian stonecrop

The species Siberian stonecrop is covered by a specific exemption from the prohibitions in Chapter 3, Section 1 of the Ordinance on Invasive Alien Species. The exemption means that the prohibitions do not apply to specimens of Caucasian stonecrop Phedimus spurius and Siberian stonecrop Phedimus hybridus that are used or are to be used on sedum or vegetation roofs, provided that the roofs were constructed before or no later than three years after the species was added to the national list.

Private landowners and holders of rights of use are not subject to an eradication obligation, but for government agencies, municipalities and regions the same rules apply as for the species listed on the EU list. However, private landowners and holders of rights of use must also take the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the species from their own property, if, in their capacity as property owners or holders of rights of use, they have the right to take such measures.

Annual buttonweed

Annual buttonweed can grow up to 20 cm tall and is an annual, hairless herb. It can be recognised by its yellow, button-like flattened flower heads, about one centimetre wide and lacking ray florets, borne on long stalks. It flowers from June until late autumn. The plant has fleshy, stem-clasping, often reddish-green, lance-shaped leaves with toothed or lobed margins. The species may grow as individual small plants, as dense tussocks, or form more or less dense mats.

Most populations of annual buttonweed in Sweden are found along the coasts of the southern and south-eastern parts of the country and on the west coast, especially in Skåne, Blekinge, Småland, on Öland and Gotland, and in Halland. Particularly dense and extensive populations have been reported on Öland and along the south-east coast, where the species occurs in coastal meadows, shallow shores and other coastal, disturbed environments. Further north, its occurrence is more limited and mainly sporadic, with isolated records up to Södermanland.

Image source: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency Annual buttonweed

Wall cotoneaster

Wall cotoneaster is a shrub up to about 1.5 metres tall that forms dense and extensive thickets. It has a woody stem and leaves with a glossy dark green upper side and a lighter, slightly hairy underside. Flowering takes place in May-June and consists of many small, five-petalled flowers that are white or pale pink. In autumn, the plant develops bright red to orange leaves and dark red, elongated berries that contribute to recognition of the species.

The species can sometimes be confused with rockspray cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*), but that species differs clearly by being much lower, usually only 20-50 cm high, and by having rounder berries.

Wall cotoneaster grows mainly on dry to fresh rocky ground that is relatively open. It often grows at the edges of woodland patches, in clearings, in scrubland or along roadsides on sandy, gravelly or moraine soils. Wall cotoneaster is a major problem on the alvar of Öland where the soil is reasonably deep or in karst fissures.

Image source: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency Wall cotoneaster

Wall cotoneaster is an alien species that is nationally classified as invasive. The species is covered by a regional exemption in the legislation, under which prohibitions on handling and spread apply in Gotland and Kalmar counties. In the rest of the country there is no formal prohibition, but landowners and operators are responsible for preventing its spread.

1.5 Remaining invasive plants on the EU list

Below are the other invasive plants included on the EU list of invasive species. The plants described above are those we are most likely to encounter in the field, but the species below must also be taken into account.

Tree of heaven - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Persian hogweed - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Common milkweed - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Yellow skunk cabbage - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

Oriental bittersweet - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

False Virginia creeper - Species facts from the SLU Swedish Species Information Centre

2 Revision history

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1 valid from 2026-05-29	New appendix translated from Swedish.	VD