

Invasive plant species

Japanese Knotweed

What is Japanese Knotweed?

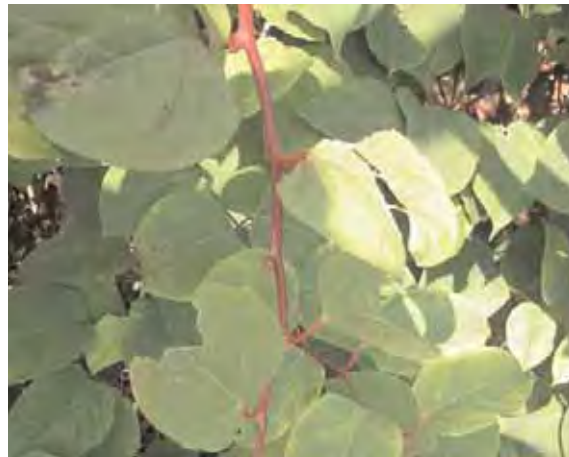
This plant was introduced to Europe as an ornamental garden plant in the early 19th Century. It has since become naturalised and is now regarded as the most invasive plant in Britain. Throughout Britain Japanese Knotweed has colonised river banks, woodlands, grasslands, coastal areas, urban parks and private gardens. It is also able to grow through brickwork, tarmac and concrete.

Identification

Japanese Knotweed has a number of distinctive characteristics that make it relatively easy to identify at all stages of growth. Reddish/purple stems and green heart shaped leaves appear in Spring with the plant growing to a height of 3m during the Summer. Clusters of creamy white flowers occur in late summer. The stem zig-zags with leaves growing from the nodes at each bend.

The plant dies off during the winter leaving hollow dead canes.

The plant spreads by its underground roots (rhizomes) which lie dormant over the winter. These can reach 7 metres outwards from the plant and 2 to 3 metres deep. Small pieces of the roots, as small as 10mm, can produce new plants.



Why control?

Japanese Knotweed causes damage to pavements, roads and walls as this plant is able to push its roots into small gaps and break through them. Knotweed has a major impact on biodiversity because it dominates the areas where it grows and spreads very quickly. It grows in dense stands that overshadow native plant species. When the knotweed dies back in winter this leaves areas of bare earth which are susceptible to erosion.

Control measures

Treatment of Japanese Knotweed can be very costly and takes time, but it is more likely to be successful the earlier the treatment begins. Control of this plant is the responsibility of the landowner or tenant of the land. Effective treatment may require landowners to work together to tackle the problem. Partial treatment of a stand of knotweed is unlikely to have any long-term impact.

The Local Authority and the Environment Agency are not responsible for the control of knotweed on behalf of other landowners.

Options for control

Chemical

Dense stands or individual plants of Japanese Knotweed can be treated with herbicide. The most effective treatment is during the growing season in Spring to Autumn. However, you should seek advice from a qualified contractor or landscape gardener. There are a variety of chemicals that can be used to treat knotweed but a number of these are not available to the general public.

The active ingredient in most commonly used chemicals is Glyphosate. There are a number of products that can be bought from garden centres that contain glyphosate but these will need repeated treatment. It is very important to read and follow the manufacturers instructions and wear any recommended protective clothing.

If the knotweed is close to any surface drains or watercourses there is a risk that runoff containing chemicals could contaminate the water. In these circumstances consent is needed from the Environment Agency before any treatment can be carried out. This will include approval of the chemicals to be used and the method for application. Applying for consent from the Environment Agency is the responsibility of the landholder, in conjunction with the spraying contractor.

Mechanical

Cutting and pulling. Regular cutting or pulling can, after a number of years, reduce the vigour of growth. This is unlikely to be effective in removing the plant but will keep the growth of knotweed under control if carried out regularly.

Mowing. Regular mowing will keep the growth of knotweed under control but the plant will regrow if mowing is stopped or there are long intervals between each cut.

Biological

There are currently a number of biological controls being tested to see if it would be possible to use natural methods of controlling knotweed. As this is under development and will take a number of years of thorough testing it will be a long time before this method is likely to be available.

Disposal

Japanese Knotweed must not be put in your refuse bin, fly-tipped or put in green waste composting schemes.

If disposing of cut or pulled Japanese Knotweed off site then all material must be taken to a licensed landfill site. The landfill operator must be informed that knotweed is present within the waste so that it can be buried within the timescales set by the Environment Agency. Whenever possible knotweed should be disposed of within the site either by burning or burying. If burning make sure the crown is in the centre of the fire. Burial of knotweed needs to be at a depth of 5 metres and the soil above the knotweed should not be disturbed by future work on the site.

If you spread or fly tip Japanese Knotweed outside your land you may be liable for prosecution.

For general enquiries contact:

Roz Park, Wigan Council, Environmental Services Department: 01942 404232
Graham Workman, Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust: 01942 828906
Environment Agency general enquiry line: 0845 933 3111

Further information on knotweed, the problems it causes and the ways to treat it is available from:

- www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment/knotweed
- www.ex.ac.uk/knotweed/

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Information in alternative formats

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