

# JAPANESE KNOTWEED

# Plant Positive

action on non-native invasive plants



From left to right: Japanese knotweed in spring shoots, summer leaves, in flowers and in winter stems

## What is it?

- Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) is probably the best-known and most notorious of all the non-native invasive plant species in the UK
- introduced to the UK as an ornamental garden plant in the mid 19th century
- a vigorous, clump-forming perennial
- bamboo-like stems reaching over 2 metres in height which regrow each year
- now commonplace and widespread across the UK, rapidly colonising waterways, hedgerows, urban areas and wasteland

## Why is it a problem?

- tackling non-native plants costs the UK £1.7 billion annually (DEFRA 2010)
- left untreated it is likely to spread
- tiny fragments of rhizome and cane can easily form new plants
- smothers/outcompetes our native plants, reducing wildlife value of an area
- contributes to the erosion of our river banks and can increase flood potential
- disturbs and impacts on the feeding habits of mammals such as the water vole
- can cause damage to buildings and hard surfaces such as tarmac and concrete
- it can reduce the value of your land or property



## How is it spread?

**Stem** - new plants can grow from the nodes on pieces of green stem in both soil and water. Strimming or flailing will just encourage it to spread in this way.

**Crown** – can survive both drying and composting and can rapidly produce new canes when it comes into contact with soil or water.

**Rhizome** (underground stem) - a single fragment, smaller than a penny, can grow into a new plant. Breaking up the rhizome stimulates the production of small, red buds each of which will grow into a new stem.

**Flowers** – Japanese knotweed can produce seeds, but they are extremely unlikely to germinate in the wild. However, Japanese knotweed can hybridise with Giant knotweed (*Fallopia x bohemica*) to then produce viable seeds.

## Legal liability

In the UK, there are two main pieces of legislation that cover Japanese knotweed:

- It is an offence to actively plant or otherwise cause the species to grow in the wild under **The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – Schedule 9, Section 14**.
- It is classed a ‘controlled waste’ under **The Environmental Protection Act 1990**, and must be disposed of safely at a licensed landfill site by a registered waste carrier according to the Environmental Protection Act (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991.
- It is not an offence to have Japanese knotweed growing on your land, although it may cause a nuisance to neighbouring properties and could result in legal action.

## What should I do if I find it?

Japanese knotweed spreads naturally via its rhizome, but can be made much worse by human action therefore it is crucial that this plant is carefully managed to minimise the risks of contamination and further spreading. The tiniest piece of root or stem carried on machinery, clothes or shoes is enough to spark a new invasion. Remember to check and keep tools, machinery and workwear free from any fragments or debris.

### **My land**

It is not illegal to have knotweed growing on your land, however it could affect your property and is advisable to take action immediately. You could even be taken to court if it spreads onto a neighbour’s land, or causes them a nuisance. The longer you leave it, the more expensive it will be to treat it.

### **Isle of Wight Council land**

Please contact the IWC Countryside Section at [countryside@iow.gov.uk](mailto:countryside@iow.gov.uk) with your record. The IWC will not take action against knotweed on private land unless it is affecting council property. However, if knotweed on council land is causing a problem to you or another landowner, let the council know so action can be taken if necessary.

### **My neighbour’s land**

If your neighbour has knotweed and it is spreading onto your land, it would be a good idea to take action before it gets near your buildings. Start with friendly discussions, but if that goes nowhere, it might be time to consult your buildings insurance company (some will act for you in such matters) or a solicitor.

### **Development land**

Work to control or eliminate knotweed is now often required as a condition of planning consent with new developments. Biosecurity is essential if knotweed is present on site. The movement of contaminated topsoil and vehicles around and between sites may then cause further spreading.



Colonisation of waterways by Japanese knotweed

## Treatment options

Unfortunately, there is no quick way of dealing with knotweed. It is likely to take several years to fully eliminate a colony, in fact the rhizome can remain dormant in the ground for at least 20 years. Digging the plant out is one option, though rarely successful and the remnants must be left to dry out and burned in situ. The most practical solution is to use a glyphosate-based weedkiller; repeated treatments will be necessary and it may be best to use an experienced contractor if you have a significant infestation.

### Chemical means

- Spray with glyphosate weedkiller in late summer, once the plant has flowered and the sap is no longer rising, then apply again in September before it begins to die down in Autumn. Keep the spray away from other garden plants.
- Any regrowth needs to be re-treated for several seasons.
- For total elimination a commercial herbicide will normally be required, which **must** be applied by a qualified person.
- Permission **must** be sought from the Environment Agency for any vegetation being treated near water.

*Before using a household herbicide, make sure to read and comply with the product information.*

### Dig it out

- Although taking a spade to knotweed can be effective (removing as much of the rhizome as possible), it is not recommended as the disturbance can stimulate growth and any remaining fragments will regenerate.
- Repeated attempts will be required for years to come.

### Disposal

- Burn the dead or dried stalks in situ.
- If this is not possible, contact a registered waste carrier.
- Avoid moving knotweed between sites as this poses a risk to biosecurity and risks spreading the plant to other places.
- **Never** compost it at home or include it with normal household or green waste.

### Biological control

A plant sucker (psyllid) has been released at eight sites in England and Wales as a biological control for Japanese knotweed. If the introduction is successful, it is hoped that this biocontrol - which is highly specific to knotweed, will spread across the UK.

*Natural Enterprise take no responsibility for the contents of this resource sheet.*

*Before taking action professional/legal advice should always be taken.*

## Useful guidance / links

### Guidance on Japanese Knotweed

Environment Agency

### Managing Japanese Knotweed on Development Sites

Environment Agency

### Identification and factsheet

Non-Native Species Secretariat

### Guidance for Identification and Control

Cornwall Council

### Information for gardeners, pond owners and retailers on invasive aquatic plants

Be Plant Wise

### Natural Enterprise

Plant Positive Project

## Help us eradicate non-native plant species on the Isle of Wight!

Plant Positive aims to tackle the non-native invasive plants that are threatening parts of the Isle of Wight ecosystem. We need your help establishing where these plants are. If you find any of our target non-native plant species, please let us know by downloading our Non-Native Invasive Plant ID and record sheets, then submitting your records to us.

