



Amenity Forum

Guidance Note

Japanese Knotweed Control



Introduction

Japanese knotweed is a perennial which forms an extensive underground rhizome (root system). It can colonise most habitats and grow through tarmac and weaknesses in brick walls and concrete. It has deep red or bright-green asparagus-like shoots in spring, which grow from its network of underground rhizomes or from hard above-ground protuberances called “crowns” which build up over years of growth.

By June, stems can reach up to 3 metres in height and develop small, cream-coloured flowers around July–August. The plant dies back at first frosts, but bare stems remain over winter, providing insulation for the rhizome, making identification relatively easy year-round.

The term Japanese knotweed applies principally to the species *Reynoutria japonica* but may also refer to:

- dwarf Japanese knotweed – *Reynoutria japonica*, var. *compacta*
- giant knotweed – *Reynoutria sachalinensis*
- Bohemian knotweed – *Reynoutria x bohemica*

Himalayan knotweed – *Polygonum polystachum* may also be referred to as ‘knotweed’ but is significantly different from and less widespread than the other knotweed species listed above. Treatment methods, however, are broadly similar.

Most Japanese knotweed seeds are non-viable, as all known *Reynoutria japonica* plants in the UK are female clones. Japanese knotweed can cross-breed with giant knotweed, forming Bohemian knotweed, which may itself produce viable seeds.

The plant spreads almost exclusively by fragments of rhizome and stem transported by humans or through watercourses, roads or railways. Even small pieces of stem or sections of rhizome smaller than one gram can grow into new plants.

Japanese Knotweed is covered under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is one of the most invasive plants in Great Britain. Under this Act, it is an offence to cause the plant to spread or grow in the wild. Landowners may also be subject to enforcement under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill 2014 if they allow plants on their land to cause an impact to amenity.

Soils containing Japanese knotweed root material and viable plant material is classed as controlled waste for the purposes of the Environment Protection Act 1990 and must be disposed of at a licensed landfill site in accordance with the Act.

Because of the ease of spread and the classification of the waste, proper management plans and bio-control are key to successful management of Japanese knotweed. Plans may

Options for control include a number of non-herbicidal methods, including large-scale excavation, burial, soil screening and relocation to waste management areas (as outlined in more detail in guidance from invasive species trade bodies), In practice, cutting, pulling and grazing are not recommended for long-term control, especially due to the potential for cross-contamination.

Attempts by CABI at introducing biological control (a psyllid aphid) have been attempted over a number of years but success has been limited up to this point.

If Japanese knotweed is identified on site, the first step should be the implementation of a Japanese Knotweed Management Plan (JKMP) including containment by good biosecurity practice combined with a chemical or mechanical control programme. It is also important to regularly monitor sites, because repeated treatment over a period of several years is usually necessary to achieve control, and Japanese knotweed rhizomes can remain dormant underground for many years.,,

Herbicide treatment options include foliar spray, stem injection or leaf-wiping. Herbicide application is generally most effective in August and September – after flowering but before die-back. Application early in the year may be appropriate early in the JKMP in order to thin the growth to allow for better access in autumn, but later in the treatment plan, could result in stunted “bonsai” growth, which can make the plant less susceptible to further treatment.

Consult your agronomist or supplier for advice on suitable herbicides and their usage restrictions and directions for use and always apply as directed.

Local environmental agency approval is required before using herbicides in aquatic areas (and conditions will vary from territory to territory). The Sustainable Use Directive expressly requires that herbicide use should be minimised in these areas – but a balance must be sought between the necessity of control, and safe working practices to protect health and safety.

Further Reading:

Environment Agency Regulatory Position Statement 178 (RPS178) –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/treatment-and-disposal-of-invasive-non-native-plants-rps-178/treatment-and-disposal-of-invasive-non-native-plants-rps-178>

Information on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

<https://www.brickfieldspark.org/miscdata/japaneseknotweedinformationnote.pdf>

Invasive Non-Native Specialists Association Code of Practice – Managing Japanese Knotweed –

<https://www.innsa.org/images/INNSA%20Code%20of%20Practice.pdf>

Property Care Association Code of Practice – Management of Japanese Knotweed

https://www.property-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PCA-COP-Control-of-Knotweed-24pp_04.05.18-WEB.pdf

WITHDRAWN – Environment Agency code of practice: Managing Japanese Knotweed on Development Sites (the knotweed code of practice)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/296930/LIT_2695_df1209.pdf