

# JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Japanese knotweed, Latin name *Fallopia japonica* is native to eastern Asia. It was introduced to the UK from Japan as an ornamental plant for the garden back in 1825 and has been spreading rapidly ever since. It has a very vigorous growth habit and can be very destructive, it can push its way up through paving, tarmac and floors, destroy gravestones damage concrete foundations, retaining walls and flood defences. Also the vigorous growth means that the knotweed is reducing the biodiversity on the ground underneath as it competes with and shades out native flora. It creates a fire hazard as it collects litter along with the previous years dried out growth.



Japanese knotweed is quite an amazing plant, as well as the ability to push through tarmac it can regenerate rhizomes buried 1 metre deep and the young shoots can grow up to 8cm per day. It can spread by a number of means such as riverbank erosion and fly tipping of garden waste and topsoil movement. Most other plants would not survive such an ordeal but the knotweed can produce a new plant from a fragment of rhizome as small as 0.7g and any stems covered with soil or water can produce new shoots and roots. It can then take over its newly inhabited area.

It has therefore been made illegal to introduce the species into the wild and you must dispose of knotweed waste legally (Environmental Protection Act 1990).

## Control

The control of Japanese knotweed is essential to help slow its spread, but it is far from easy. Repeatedly cutting the top growth may "exhaust" the rhizomous system under ground but its not likely to eradicate it as the rhizome system sustains life when the top is removed, it would need a few years of repeatedly cutting to show any improvements. You must remember that any of the cut, flailed or mown stems is capable of growing in soil, compost or water. The cut or pulled stems must be kept on site to prevent spread.

The best means of control is through the continued cutting of the stems near the soil surface with the spot application of a systematic biodegradable herbicide like glyphosate (e.g. Roundup).

The act of cutting the stems near the ground during the early to mid part of the growing season results in depleting the food reserves stored in the rhizomes that are necessary to produce new aerial shoots. Several cuttings would likely be required during a single season. Following into the next year and subsequent years until no shoots appear.

The application of glyphosate after each cut through the season, by painting the cut stems with the herbicide is likely to be the more effective and more rapid means of eliminating the underground rhizomes.