

Japanese Knotweed



Background

Fallopia japonica, or Japanese Knotweed, is native to Japan, where it is relatively rare. It grows there on the sides of active volcanoes where the extremely poor volcanic soils naturally control its growth.

It was first collected in the mid Nineteenth Century and brought to Europe by plant collectors. It became extremely popular and was widely planted in gardens and parks. In 1847 it was named the “most interesting new ornamental plant of the year” by the Society of Agriculture and Horticulture at Utrecht in Holland. It is an attractive shrub with large heart shaped leaves, bamboo like reddish tinged stems, and a rapid annual growth rate growing to a height of 2-3m before dying back at the end of each year. See YouTube clip below.

The plant propagates from underground rhizomes, rather than by seed dispersal. Each plant can develop a root system out to a radius of 7m putting up new shoots each year.

Invasive Non-native

Because of its aggressive growth and the ease with which it propagates – either from the root system or from a fragment of the plant which has been deliberately or inadvertently moved to a new site – it is now regarded as one of the four most invasive non-native species (“INNS”). The other three being Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Rhododendron ponticum. Since 2012 it has been illegal in Scotland to deliberately cause or allow Japanese Knotweed to grow in the wild. Thoughtless dumping of garden waste is often how some of these plants are spread.



The plant poses no direct risk to people or animals. It is however regarded as one of the most damaging INNS as its aggressive growth causes the plant to spread very rapidly – suppressing other plants and causing damage to property. The roots will grow through concrete, tarmac and walls. Close to buildings it can cause significant damage and can lead to insurers refusing to insure properties and affecting sale values.

Control

Control of the plant is not easy because of its rapid and aggressive growth, and because it grows from its widespread root system. As it can regrow from a fragment of viable root it normally takes several years before it can be fully removed from a site. Control methods include:

1. Removal of the vegetation above ground, the full root system and surrounding soil. The resulting material then needs to be disposed off at a specialist landfill site taking hazardous waste. This is not practical in most situations and is only used in major construction sites.
2. Repeatedly cutting and disposing responsibly of the above ground vegetation. This needs to take place over many years to ensure the root system is exhausted. In the meantime, there is an ongoing risk of either missing regrowth or deliberate/inadvertent movement of fragments of the plant to new sites.
3. Spraying of the foliage with a systemic herbicide – usually glyphosate - with follow up treatments in following years of any further growth. Risks relate to aerial spraying drifting to nearby vegetation. Glyphosate is a relatively safe herbicide commonly used by home gardeners and available off the shelf from garden centres and other shops.
4. Stem injecting of the bamboo like stems, in the late Summer/early Autumn, with a relatively concentrated solution of herbicide – again usually glyphosate. This is a more controlled and targeted application of the chemical and improves the take up of the herbicide throughout the root system. Any growth with stems too small for injection should be dealt with by targeted foliage spraying. Again, it is important to continue to monitor the site closely for several years and undertake further treatment should there be any regrowth.

Whilst the different treatment methods are all valid depending on the individual circumstances stem injection is generally regarded as the most efficient, effective, and safest (in terms of the environment and people) of the methods.

Outbreak in Kirkhill

An outbreak of Japanese Knotweed has been identified in the Millenium Garden next to the Community Centre within Kirkhill. This was found in early Summer 2020 and the indications are that this is the first year that the plant has been present on this site. It is not clear how it arrived. It is possible that the plant is present elsewhere in the village but undetected. This blog and associated communications are intended to let the community know what is happening, why, and to raise awareness of the plant so it can be controlled should it be elsewhere in the community.

After some discussion it has been agreed that volunteers from the Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust will control the Japanese Knotweed outbreak using the stem injection method described above. The costs of doing this are being covered by the Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council who are responsible for the management of the Millenium Garden. The Trust already has experience of successfully eradicating an outbreak of Himalayan Balsam, one of the other four worst INNS, at Cabrich. INNS outbreaks are likely to become even more frequent into the future and will often require control through local voluntary action.

Conclusion

We have an outbreak of Japanese Knotweed within a public area of Kirkhill village, close to the Community Centre and domestic properties. Fortunately, this has been detected early making its eradication at this site easier. The Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Trust are undertaking this control, by stem injection, and will monitor the site in future years to ensure the eradication is effective. This will lead to an increased capacity to undertake further control of invasive non-native plant species in future. This blog and associated



communications will raise community awareness of what is happening, why and increase the likelihood of further incidences of the plant within the community being detected and dealt with.

If you have any queries or information on the presence of Japanese Knotweed elsewhere in the community please contact KBCT Trustee George Hogg on georgehogg60@gmail.com or 07523 655633.

Links to further information:

[Time lapse video of Japanese Knotweed growth.](#)

[Information on non-native plants in Scotland – Scottish Natural Heritage.](#)

[Royal Horticultural Society Article.](#)