

Japanese Knotweed

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Background

Japanese knotweed was introduced as garden plant by the Victorians. It is native to Japan but in the UK it is an invasive weed. It is undesirable on the National Cycle Network because it displaces native vegetation, can obstruct paths and can cause damage to the paths.

Japanese knotweed is listed as a non-native species under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Whilst there is no obligation to control this species if it occurs on our land, it is an offence to cause the species to spread. Some works to be undertaken by the maintenance and construction teams can cause this species to spread in contravention of the legislation.

It is also important to note that under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (and associated 1991 Duty of care regulations) Japanese knotweed is a 'controlled waste'. Any parts of the plant or soil that could contain rhizomes (parts of the roots) must be disposed of at a licensed landfill site.

This information note details how to recognise it, how to avoid its spread through day to day activities, its control and disposal and implications for route development.

How to recognise Japanese knotweed

Japanese knotweed dies back every year to leave 3 m tall dead stems in the winter. In the spring the new stems grow up from the base.



The hollow stems are red, or green with red speckles. The main stems zig-zag between leaf stems, which are on alternate sides of the stem. The leaves are large, thin and heart-shaped.



In September and October the plant has white flowers.

Preventing the spread of Japanese knotweed

This plant should not be uprooted or any part of it (such as cut stems) moved away from its current location. New plants can grow from sections of recently cut stem and from sections of root. Where the plant occurs in close proximity to the path, regular mowing could accidentally cause it to spread, in contravention of legislation. To avoid this happening, contractors should be aware of its presence and leave those sections unmown. Exclusion fencing may be useful to prevent the accidental trimming of this species.

No works that break the ground should be undertaken within a 7 m radius of the plant. This is because the roots of Japanese knotweed have 'rhizomes', which are nodules from which an entire plant can re-grow. A piece of root the size of a finger nail can grow into a new plant. The roots of the plant spread in a 7 m radius around the plant.

If digging or construction work is required within this 7 m radius, a method statement must be prepared to prevent its spread.

Japanese knotweed control

Although the control of Japanese knotweed is not a legal obligation, the species is an undesirable and can be eradicated. Herbicide treatment is a cheap method of eradicating Japanese knotweed but can take several years. There are a number of appropriate herbicides dependent on the particular situation. Personnel undertaking herbicide treatment must have appropriate training and certification.

Japanese knotweed and route development

Construction work can cause Japanese knotweed to spread. When working within 7m of Japanese knotweed a Method Statement must be prepared. There are a variety of different approaches that can be taken to prevent the spread of this species. Where no-dig construction is being conducted it may be that membranes can be used to prevent its spread and subsequent penetration of the path. Should it require removal, disposal becomes costly as the remains must be taken to a registered landfill, buried at depth or burnt. The Method Statement will also include measures to clean machinery involved to prevent the inadvertent transportation of plant material.

For more information please see the Environment Agency publication: Managing Invasive Non-native Plants
<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/GEHO0410BSBR-e-e.pdf>