

Japanese Knotweed

Identification:

The Japanese knotweed is a vivacious plant imported from Asia. It can be seen in wetlands, along roadsides or waterways. It grows fast, up to 3m tall in thick patch. Its alternate leaf, forming a zig-zag pattern on the stems, are about the size of a hand with a thin point at the apex. The stem itself is characteristic: green to red, it is solid and hollow, like a bamboo. It can produce white flowers in clusters at the end of the stems. The root system is also very developed: the rhizomes can extend over 7m and up to 3m in depth. Some say that a piece of rhizome can remain inactive for nearly 20 years and still be viable.

Similar species:

There are actually three species of knotweed: Japanese knotweed, Sakhalin knotweed and their hybrid, Bohemian knotweed. The latter is very similar, differing only slightly to his Japanese parent: the leaves are larger, and their base is sometimes heart-shaped. Fortunately, differencing them is not required since all species are as dangerous and invasive, even if the Bohemian have been described as slightly more aggressive in its invasion.



Nuisance

Its thick foliage, rapid growth, and its ease to maintain, can be appealing for gardens. However, this plant grows dense immensely fast and take over most places it colonises in a matter of a few years, leaving most species incapable of growth near them. This is amplified by the excretion of a toxin by the rhizomes that slows down other's plants growth. During the winter, aerial parts of the plant die, leaving only the rhizomes. This can lead to severe flooding and bank erosion in winter and spring. In addition, the sprout's lightning growth allows them to pierce the asphalt, and even the cement or the concrete if it is already cracked. In some cases, it is even considered a problem for structures.

Why is an invasive species a problem?

All invasive species reproduce quickly, have no local predators, pose a threat to local plants living in similar conditions, and their elimination is almost impossible. Therefore, we must do everything in our power to prevent their spread. Report them on Sentinelle, the provincial website.



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What to do?

If you considered buying one, choose regional options such as the Pennsylvania smartweed, red-osier dogwood or pinkweed. These alternatives do not grow as fast, but produce seed attracting many local bird species. If you see a colony of Japanese knotweed on your property or in a public place, contact the municipality by email at stagiaire@cantonstanstead.ca, or phone at (819) 876-2948, ext. 227. If you want to remove them, total excavation with backfill by healthy soil is the best way but can be near impossible. Cutting off the stems from the ground often for years is more doable. This will weaken the plant and eventually kill it. To speed up the process, apply a weighted black tarp to prevent regrowth and check around for sprouts. When you have cut pieces, put them in a sturdy plastic bag and place it in your black or green garbage bin. Do not put it in the brown compost bin as the stems and roots may survive the trip and disperse into the compost facility.

