

Japanese knotweed

Polygonum cuspidatum

This aggressive perennial used to be considered a “west side” problem. Today, Japanese knotweed, in addition to Bohemian, Giant, and Himalayan knotweeds, are considered to be the most important noxious weeds throughout the State of Washington. House Bill 1423 states, “The legislature finds that the presence of invasive knotweed on public and private land threatens wildlife habitat, agricultural production and environmental quality statewide.” If the Bill passes, it will provide \$500,000 a year for the next two years to be used statewide for knotweed control.

Japanese knotweed is an impressive plant that may grow ten feet in height with leaves up to 6 inches in length and 2 to 5 inches in width. Also called Mexican bamboo, because of its hollow stems, it was brought into this country as an ornamental. It can be found across the United States and as far north as Kodiak, Alaska. The plant is dioecious, which means that the male and female greenish colored flowers occur on separate plants. Fertile males are rare. However, it may hybridize with other knotweeds thus producing viable seed. Japanese knotweed’s primary method of reproduction is by plant parts. A small rhizome fragment or a stem internode may produce a new colony. Spring floods and human activities are the most common means of spreading this plant. Colonies may be as small as a couple of plants or as large as 1500 square feet. Dense colonies dominate many riparian areas on the Westside of the state. Knotweeds early emergence and extreme height as well as its dense rhizome base, allow it to out compete native vegetation. It can grow up to 3 inches per day. This hardy plant has been known to grow through 2 inches of asphalt.

Japanese knotweed spreads primarily along river banks, but it also grows in wetlands, waste places, along roadways, and in other disturbed areas. It can grow in a wide pH range as well as a wide variety of soil types. Knotweeds can tolerate broad differences in organic matter and nutrients.

In Asotin County we have identified less than two dozen colonies. Most of these are in riparian habitat along Asotin Creek. The largest of these is approximately 250 square feet. There are at least 3 gardens in our area with ornamental knotweeds. The Asotin County Noxious Weed Control Board is working closely with these individuals to help them eliminate this plant. If you have an infestation please contact the Weed Board for assistance.

