

Japanese knotweed

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You have to feel for them. They call us having been up half the night with worry; you sense they're on the verge of cracking up. They can't think straight, they can hardly string a coherent sentence together. But even though the noises coming down the wire are a tangled mess of half-uttered curses and whimpers, we know exactly what to say...

"So you have Japanese knotweed and you want to sell your house but the bank has said no?"

"Uh um, n..... yes".

"No problem, let's get you sorted out."

"Uh uh r, r, really?"

"Yes, really."

Japanese knotweed is, for some people, the work of the devil. It can, and will, reduce the value of a property, send potential buyers running and even provoke trained chartered surveyors into making statements such as, "Yes Mr Smith, there's knotweed in the rear garden - I wouldn't go near this one if I was you." Helpful.

The thing is, despite its fearsome reputation, Japanese knotweed can be dealt with, controlled and even eradicated. And even though the devil may have been involved somewhere along the line, we don't use holy water, just herbicides.

Some facts.

Japanese knotweed is not a notifiable weed. It is however, when dug up, classed as controlled waste, along with the soils surrounding it up to (by the letter of the law) seven metres from any visible growth.

Japanese knotweed can cause structural damage to built structures, including the homes we live in, the paths we walk, the roads we drive, the car parks we... you get the picture. Walls can be pushed over by knotweed crown growth. Foundations can be ripped apart. Sheds, conservatories and fences can literally be pulled down to the ground. Tarmac car parks? Mincemeat.

However, all of these mini-dramas are very uncommon. Knotweed will, like any plant, take the line of least resistance when seeking out water and nutrients. It doesn't want to tear your house down.

Identification is relatively easy - I'm not giving you a written description and photofit of the perp here; you have Google for that.

Japanese knotweed is not a fussy eater (pretty much any soil type will do). Its root system is extensive (think icebergs) and it is relentless. It must also suffer growing pains; 10 cm of vertical growth a day is not unheard of.

Last fact; young Japanese knotweed is edible (come on let's all get together and chew it out of existence).

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Knotweed can be excavated and removed (at a price) when it's really necessary, or controlled and remediated through a properly structured management plan using herbicide treatments. These two methods are often used in parallel. Additionally, expert installation of a decent root-barrier can add that final nail in the coffin for the knotweed.

Perhaps the most important element in a planned assault on Japanese knotweed is time, or rather, a timely response. The longer knotweed is left to its own devices, the higher the cost of treatment, removal and repairs to damaged property. The chance of receiving a 'business-like' solicitor's letter from an aggrieved neighbour also rises while you delay decision making. Recent studies by the world's leading brains have led to this being expressed thus;

$$£ = n(JKm^2 \times T^3)$$

where 'n' = number of properties/owners affected and 'T' = time. This is known as the General Theory of Knotweed Relativity.

Bringing in some experience and expertise at the right time can save you a packet in the long run, help maintain good relationships with other property owners and prevent loss of asset value.

So, if you're ever worried by the thought of knotweed wrecking your budget, you know what to do.

(Optional) Eat the knotweed, or, if you don't like the taste / you tried 1. and you are now full, 2. call in a PCA accredited specialist without delay.