

Japanese Knotweed Threat

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Recent unseasonably low temperatures may well have postponed the peak growing season for Japanese knotweed by a few weeks but, in reality, this invasive, non-native plant species has proved continually resilient to most climatic conditions, as Japanese Knotweed Control's Joint Managing Director, David Layland explains.

Originally native to eastern Asia and China before being introduced into Europe in the 19th century as an ornamental plant, Japanese knotweed's rapid, and at times devastating, spread is indicative of its ability to adapt to a wide range of climatic conditions. No matter how wet our summers get, or how cold our winters, the UK's varied and unpredictable weather is never likely to seriously diminish the knotweed threat.

It's true that in winter, or even in the unseasonably cold conditions of recent weeks, the plant will remain dormant – indeed the rhizome material can lie dormant for up to 20 years – but it will not die. Once temperatures increase, the knotweed soon rejuvenates and quickly catches up with its growth schedule.

In recent years, our work has taken us to all corners of the British Isles and the damage caused by widespread knotweed never fails to surprise. In the remote Hebridean Western Isles, for example, where Japanese Knotweed Control has carried out a number of treatment programmes, the climate and geography present their own particular environmental challenges. Yet even here Japanese knotweed is widespread and increasingly impacting on a number of development projects.

Many plants don't cope well with the harsh Scottish climate, less still the bracing conditions of the Outer Hebrides, but whilst

the shallow peat soils, high winds and salt air have meant that, like many plants on the islands, knotweed's growth has been stunted; its spread has been no less prolific, even ousting many native plant species in its wake.

The one weather condition that does affect Japanese knotweed, though unfortunately not a positive way, is heavy rainfall. Knotweed, as well as other invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, are all growing in increasing numbers along our river corridors, often with serious impact on the biodiversity of the riparian and aquatic environment. As rain falls and water levels rise, there is increased risk of rhizome spread along the length of the river and many river authorities are now recognising and addressing this problem.

With UK weather conditions unlikely, however, to have any impact on reducing knotweed growth, the return of the growth season once again sees it largely left to professional treatment specialists to try and tackle the problem. For Japanese Knotweed Control, the treatment techniques that we've employed throughout the winter, for example excavation and dig and dump, tend to make way for our preferred method of stem injection treatment.

The stem injection equipment, which injects a given dose of glyphosate herbicide directly into the plant stem, is increasingly recognised as achieving maximum control and specific to the plant species, with no impact on the surrounding vegetation and wildlife.

The knotweed absorbs the herbicide into the rhizome with a much faster absorbency rate than that of foliar spraying and, crucially, much greater accuracy. Results can be seen within two weeks as the weed goes dormant

and shows visible signs of foliar decay. This also enables any canes missed during the initial treatment process to be readily identified and treated with a re-application.

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Most significantly, stem injection is not dependent on weather conditions such as wind or rain and can be safely used in most site conditions without any risk of spray-drift or run-off.