

Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia

Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)

Description

Japanese knotweed is a herbaceous perennial in the buckwheat family. It can grow three to nine and a half feet in height. It is sometimes called Mexican bamboo because of its stout, round, hollow stems and formations of dense clumps. It forms rhizomes which can reach forty-five to sixty feet in length. The leaves are two to six inches long and two to five inches wide, flattened at the base, and taper to a point at the end. The greenish-white flowers occur in clusters along the stem. Flowers bloom from August to September. The three-sided seeds are shiny black-brown. Its primary mean of reproduction appears to be vegetative. Rhizome fragments readily give rise to new plants. Japanese knotweed closely resembles giant knotweed, another member of the buckwheat family. Giant knotweed is taller and has larger leaves with a rounded leaf base. Consult a field guide or natural resource specialist for accurate identification.

Habitat

Japanese knotweed is found in moist open habitats. It has been reported from riverbanks and islands, wetlands, along roadways, hillsides, and disturbed areas in a variety of soil types. It does poorly in a forested understory.

Distribution

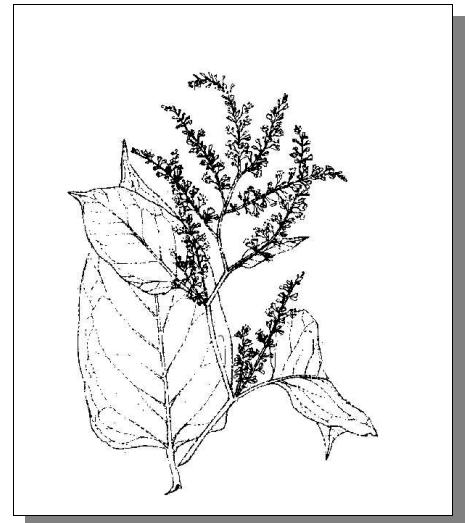
Native to Asia, Japanese knotweed came to the United States as an ornamental via England about a century ago. It has since spread in the wild and is now found from Nova Scotia to North Carolina. Japanese knotweed is widely scattered in Virginia.

Threats

Japanese knotweed emerges in early spring and grows rapidly to heights of six to nine feet. It forms dense, nearly pure stands which crowd out native plants. It reproduces almost solely from rhizomes. The rhizomes can regenerate from very small fragments. Fragments are transported to new sites by water and by humans moving soil as fill dirt. The deep roots enable it to outcompete other plants for water and nutrients. Once established, Japanese knotweed is very difficult to eradicate.

Control

Although not yet a serious pest in Virginia natural habitats, the presence of Japanese knotweed is of great concern. Experience in other states where it is a serious pest suggests that the best control method is prevention of establishment. The plant should be eradicated as early as possible upon its appearance. Cutting the stalks as




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often as three times during the growing season will offset growth of the rhizomes. Cutting followed immediately by application of a glyphosate herbicide has been found to be most effective. This should be done in late August through September when plants are translocating material to their root system for the winter. Several years of treatments may be needed to ensure that the rhizomes have been exterminated.

Illustration from *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*, by Lawrence Newcomb, Little, Brown and Company. Used with permission.

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For more information, contact the Department of Conservation and Recreation or the Virginia Native Plant Society.


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