

Japanese Knotweed (Mexican Bamboo)

Polygonum cuspidatum

Buckwheat Family (Polygonaceae)



What does it look like? Japanese knotweed, native to Japan, is an herbaceous perennial that forms large clumps 3 to 10 ft. high. It reproduces by seed and spreads by large, extensive rhizomes. The stout stems are hollow and bamboo-like, and persist into the winter. The flowers are greenish white and appear in summer. The fruiting calyx is wing-angled and the seeds are shiny black/brown.

What habitats are threatened by this plant? Knotweed thrives in a wide variety of habitats. In Japan, it grows on volcanic soils high in sulphur and with a pH of less than 4. In the U.S., it has been observed growing in a variety of soil types, including silt, loam, and sand with a pH range of 4.5-7.4. Primarily, knotweed is found in moist sites, but also has been reported growing in xeric (dry) sites. Knotweed's distribution is affected by light. It is found primarily in sunny sites; growth and abundance are depressed in shady sites. It spreads primarily along riverbanks, and grows in wetlands, waste places, along roadways, and other disturbed areas.

How does this plant spread? Japanese knotweed's primary mode of reproduction in the U.S. is through extensive rhizomes that can reach 16 to 20 ft. in length. Dispersal can occur naturally when rhizome fragments are washed downstream by currents and deposited on banks. More commonly it is dispersed when humans transport soil as fill dirt. Rhizomes can regenerate from small fragments, and have been observed regenerating when they are buried up to 3 ft. deep and also growing through 2 in. of asphalt.

Where is this plant found in the United States? In North America, Japanese knotweed is widely found in the east, from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to North Carolina, and in much of the Midwest and the coastal areas of Washington and Oregon. Large stands have been noted in western Pennsylvania, particularly along the banks and on the islands of the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers.

How can this plant be controlled? Do not use this plant in the landscape. Once Japanese knotweed is established it is extremely difficult to eradicate. Control small patches by digging out the entire plant, including tiny pieces of rhizome, which can regrow. Control larger infestations with persistent cutting throughout the growing season and/or repeated use of glyphosate herbicide, such as Roundup. Follow label directions when applying any herbicide. More than one growing season probably will be required to completely eradicate all but the smallest stands.

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