

Halting the Invasion - Japanese Knotweed

The spread of invasive alien plant and animal species is one of the greatest threats to global biodiversity - never more so than today, with increasing foreign trade and travel. An ongoing research project by Nui, Galway, in conjunction with 'People and Nature', the Galway County Biodiversity Project, is investigating the spread of the invasive non-native plant, Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) in Co. Galway. The researchers are now asking for help from the public to identify affected parts of Galway.

Away from its origins in Asia, Japanese knotweed is one of the most invasive plant species in the world and is now a severe problem in many countries. This 'super-weed' grows at a phenomenal rate of 10cm a day and will reach between 2 to 3m in height in the summer. One little plant may look innocent enough, but spreading by underground rhizomes, it can rapidly colonise large areas, quickly forming tall dense knotweed 'jungles' that crowd out native plants and animals. It can also cause huge financial losses - through structural damage to roads, paths, graveyards and other structures - and it can be extremely difficult and expensive to control. It has no natural enemies in this part of the world to help control its spread.

Japanese knotweed is a particular problem in the UK, where it is regarded as their most destructive weed, and is rapidly becoming a problem here in Ireland. Only a small fragment of the plant is needed to start a new colony so it is increasingly found along waterways, roadsides and disturbed ground where fragments of the weed have been introduced by fly tipping, soil movement or simply washed ashore by the river. Therefore, care must be taken when trying to remove the weed, as cutting it may actually help spread it even further.

It has come as little surprise that Japanese knotweed is thriving in the mild damp conditions in the west of Ireland and parts of Galway City and county are already heavily infested, particularly next to rivers and canals in the city and along roadsides in Connemara. By reporting sightings you can help prevent its spread through Galway and protect our native flora and habitats.

Information leaflets can be downloaded from: **www.alienspecies.ie**

or

www.galway.ie

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