

# Japanese Knotweed Information Sheet

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Japanese Knotweed is a very aggressive invasive plant, spreading at an accelerated pace and very difficult to control. Invasive plants crowd out plants sustaining established wildlife communities. The longer we wait, the more damage will be done and the more difficult it will be to control it. And, the more invasive plants succeed, the less wildlife will flourish, eroding what makes Swampscott special.

## How do I identify Japanese Knotweed?

Study the photos on this Information Sheet. Of course, seeing knotweed in person is the best way to learn to identify it. Look for the distinctively painted yellow stakes around town marking infestations. Happy spotting!



## How do I control Japanese Knotweed if I find it on my property?

Japanese Knotweed is very difficult to kill or control, requiring consistent attention over a period of years for success. The method recommended for homeowners with small infestations is Continuous Cutting. The idea behind Continuous Cutting is to deprive the roots of the energy produced by the leaves. This starves the plant and prevents it from storing the energy it needs to sprout.

Starting in mid-June, cut and remove the above ground portion of the plant at least twice a month until the first killing frost. Dispose of the cuttings carefully because they will sprout if given the chance. With each cutting, be sure to carefully check a wider area because the plant spreads underground.

Patience is the key. Expect to battle Japanese Knotweed for 3 to 5 years. Even then, you need to monitor your property every year to make sure it hasn't returned.

Japanese knotweed and other invasive plants love disturbed soil. As soon as your knotweed is under control, plant something to take its place. Also, plant native. It's important to support our wildlife communities with the plants that belong here (and won't need fertilizer or watering to thrive).

## Commit Before You Cut!

In many plants - including Japanese knotweed - cutting stimulates growth. So, please do not cut back any knotweed





Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia Japonica*)

Spring: Red/purple asparagus-like shoots, Rapid cane growth up to 10 feet. Green leaves unfurl.

Summer: Canes have distinctive purple speckle. Plants form dense stands 10 feet tall. Attractive small white flowers in August.

Autumn: Dense thickets remain. Leaves turn yellow and begin to wilt. Distinctive mix of green and yellow within the thicket.

Winter: Flowers and leaves die off. Bamboo-like canes turn darkish red and die off but can remain standing throughout the winter.

unless you have committed to continue cutting until the first hard frost (for 3-5 years!). Otherwise, you will have made the situation worse.

## Proper Disposal Is Critical

Knotweed spreads from cuttings, making proper disposal critically important. Dead growth from winter can be burned or composted. New or emerging growth can be placed in plastic garbage bags for disposal at the transfer station or can be left to “solar sterilize” in the bag for at least 3 months to assure that it is dead. At that point it will be safe to compost what is in the bags. Live growth should never be disposed of in a compost pile or brush/leaf dump.

## What about Herbicides?

For larger infestations you need expert help. The use of herbicides to control Japanese knotweed requires training and a state licensed applicator. Typically, a solution is injected directly into the plant’s stem at the appropriate time of year or the leaves are sprayed under very controlled conditions. The strength and quantity of the proper herbicide, the timing and correct application techniques are all important to make the treatment both safe and effective.

## Important Reminder!

If your property is close to water or a wetland, check to see if the Mass. Wetlands Protection Act regulations apply to you. If so, you’ll need a permit. **Swampscott is currently piloting a Minor Knotweed Removal Permit process for small-scale control efforts by landowners.** If you have questions, call Marissa Meaney at 781-596-8829 x1271.

## For more information:

Please refer to the Conservation Commission webpage at [swampscottma.gov/conservation-commission](http://swampscottma.gov/conservation-commission)

Conservation Commission  
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