

How to Battle Japanese Knotweed and Win

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Armed with knowledge and backed by experts in the field, a small group of friends and neighbors from Sandgate, Vermont gathered on the second and fourth Monday of June to September 2019 to combat our collective enemy: the invasive Japanese Knotweed.

We chose a site located at the dry hydrant pull-off, a heavily traveled main road leading into Sandgate with the goal of sparking maximum public curiosity and awareness. The results were immediate! In a single day, the wall of Knotweed was brought to its knees, revealing a peaceful river and the perfect spot for a shallow summer dip on a hot humid day.



The public noticed too. Hunches and questions began flying around town. What was that big black plastic mound lying at the side of the paved pull-off?

Have a growing mass of Japanese Knotweed near you? It's time to wage war against this invasive species and protect our native landscape.

Here's how:

Step 1: Plan Your Attack

Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) grows with complete abandon sending underground roots up to forty feet from the center of the mother plant. Colonies sprout ad infinitum. Control begins by walking a forty-foot perimeter from the center of the growth. Repeat until you see no more. Once a perimeter is formed, begin removal of the plant from the outside and move toward the center.

Attacking from the outside of the infestation where the plants are smaller and fewer seems less rewarding. Everyone tends to want to get the biggest bang for the buck and chop down the tallest, densest area first. A change of mindset is needed to win over Japanese Knotweed. The roots are akin to a wildfire spreading invisibly underground fooling the blind eye. One MUST stop the invisible roots from spreading out from the central plant by attacking an infestation from the outside perimeter. You may not be able to kill it all but you will be able to create preservation pockets and prevent



further advancement.

Step 2: Cut, Bundle & Bake

At a Forest Hero workshop sponsored by VT Invasives I learned that the best way to kill and dispose of the unforgiving plant is to cut it, bundle it, and bake it. I located a 10' x 25' roll of heavy-duty black plastic at a local hardware store and we made a "burrito bag". We cut and placed stalks of Knotweed in a large pile placed in the center and toward one end of the unfurled roll. Excess plastic was folded over the pile and secured with stones.

Step 3: Cut Off the Energy Supply

Every two weeks, we returned to cut, bundle and bake the short stalks that were just beginning to leaf out. Herein lies the genius! First, allow the energy stored in the plant's roots to travel up the stalk and begin producing leaves. Second, activate a photosynthesis intervention by cutting the leaves before they have a chance to fully open and gather light energy. Remember, timing is everything. Japanese Knotweed is a master of storing energy. Simply cutting stalks before leaves are forming does not deplete the energy source. Leaves forming is evidence that energy is being released. Open leaves are evidence that energy is being replaced. I repeat: cut the leaves before they have a chance to fully open!

Step 4: Don't Give Up the Fight

Continue your cutting every 2 weeks until the energy storehouse is completely depleted and the plant succumbs. How long will it take? Possibly up to five years. It's a big job for one person, so organizing a group of committed 'Knotweed Warriors' can help keep up the fight. Don't forget, your effort in the battle against Japanese Knotweed is paramount in protecting and preserving Vermont's natural landscapes.

Not all invasive species plants are created equal and not all plants are maintained or eradicated the same way. Learn more about the effects invasive plants have on our native plants and animals, and how to identify and deal with unwelcome plants at: www.vtinvasives.org.

"The Forest Hero Network is a collaboration between Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, and VTinvasives.org.