

Knot in Hyde Park Frequently Asked Questions



KiHP is a volunteer effort aimed at bringing the issue of Japanese Knotweed (JKW) out into the open. We want it to be something that we manage as a community; something that we deal with -- like cleaning up litter, mowing the roadsides, plowing the roads -- rather than a thing we fear or ignore. We aren't experts, but we're learning. The Q&A below is our best attempt to share what we're learning. We'll revise this document as we get more questions and learn more from experts and from our own experiments in the field. If you have any questions about the best approach for your situation, just get in touch with KiHP through admin@hydeparkvt.com.

What is the best way to eradicate knot weed?

The best way to eradicate JKW depends on the facts and circumstances of the site and the infestation. It is always best to tackle it early when it is first appearing rather than after it has been left to become mature and established. And it also true that there is no single-shot way to eradicate the plant. It will take time and persistence.

Japanese Knotweed is an extremely vigorous plant. Once established its root system is said to be deep and broad. It spreads through rhizomes which themselves give rise to roots, aerial stems, and more rhizomes. There are various ways to manage JKW, including repeated and persistent cutting & mowing; cutting and smothering; cutting and application of herbicide. It is also possible to engage an invasive species professional to excavate a site and recommend or execute follow-up protocols.

One state's report on roadside management stated it this way: "The best approach is to use as many methods as possible so that each operation adds to the effect of previous operations."

As a community, an important contributor to stopping the spread of KW is to make sure that it isn't spread through contaminated fill or gravel, which is a common problem.

Can I smother JKW?

Yes. There are many descriptions of this on the internet. Most of them say to:

(a) Cut the KW back to the ground. You can do this anytime, but a good time to do it is late June when the plant will have spent a lot of its energy growing for the season. Loppers, hand clippers or hand pulling -- all may work depending on the stand of KW. If you have a very large patch of KW a hand-operated brush cutter (weed whacker with a blade) should work well. Weed whippers with strings are not recommended: not only might they get tangled in the stalks but they will tend to spread plant material widely.

(b) Layer something softer over the cut-back patch. This protects the barrier from the sharp ends of the cut stalks which could puncture it (for example the pressure of deer walking over a plastic barrier might lead to stalks to punch through) and it helps

stop the stalks from breaking through the barrier as they regrow -- which they will invariably try to do. It's not really practical for most people to layer the patch with mulch or grass clippings which many websites recommend. But it may be enough to neatly lay the cut JKW plant material down over the site first. That material will die and decompose under the barrier. Thick black plastic is a common barrier. Old carpets have been used. Heavy duty landscape/road cloth may work. Heavy duty tarps should also work. People have also used sheets of metal roofing. Or some combination of all of these. Make sure the barrier is weighed down at the edges or the plant will squeeze out the sides looking for light.

(c) Make sure the barrier extends several feet beyond the KW patch -- because the roots/rhizomes will extend outward from the mother plants and send up new shoots from there.

KiHP is hoping to conduct an experiment later this summer on a site using both heavy duty road cloth and rubber roofing to test their effectiveness at smothering.

All information available says you will need to leave the barrier in place for several years. The more mature the patch of KW, the longer the barrier will need to stay in place. And of course monitor the edges for 'breaches'. You can pull/cut and/or lay more barrier material.

Is cutting the stalks down enough to stop the weed. Will it just grow back?

No it is not and Yes it will. The plant has stored energy in its roots/rhizomes. It will send out new shoots after it is cut back. Mowing or repeated (bi-weekly) cutting will weaken the plant and eventually lead to its demise. How long that will take depends on the size/maturity of the original stand. There are many locations where you can see a lawn that is mowed right next to a 10' stand of KW. This tells us that mowing works on one level. But it is also true that if you stop mowing the KW will re-grow because the plant -- and the rhizomes that support it -- is still alive right next door. JKW doesn't respect boundary lines or changes in land contours. If you want to work toward eradicating a patch you will need to work to eradicate the whole patch. Or accept that the repeated cutting and mowing will be a perpetual requirement.

What if burning is not allowed due to drought conditions?

You can safely store cut plant material to dry (and die) while waiting for end-of-season to burn when conditions are more favourable. Check out instructions for creating a "drying stack" elsewhere on the Town website. One town resident had a large sided trailer that was not being used; and also a big old watering tank. He stored his cut JKW in those waiting for it to dry and for a burning time that suited the conditions and his timing.

Making an orderly drying pile allows you keep track of the plant material -- it isn't going to run away in a heavy rain event; and it isn't going to re-root in the soil. You can watch it and respond to anything you see. We're experimenting with leaving the drying stacks in site -- not taking the added step of taking the dead plant material away to burn. It will compress over the winter and then you can just add to the stack again in the spring.

The biggest problem are the root balls and rhizomes. Very often when pulling KW some root mass will come out. The roots and rhizomes remain viable much longer than the stalks. It's not a good idea to toss them in the drying stack, because they will not dry at the same rate and are likely to sprout new stalks. It's better to isolate root balls/rhizomes and keep them somewhere safe until you can burn or until we have, as a Town, identified a central site where we can take such things to die and be composted. You can store them in closed containers or black bags. Put those bags/containers where you won't lose track or forget about them.

Can't I just lay the stalks down to dry rather than put them in a stack?

Yes in some circumstances that's a good option. When conditions are hot and dry the stalks should dry and die relatively quickly. And the more the stalks are exposed to the air and sun the faster that will happen. A slab of black top in the wide-open sun is an ideal drying station. Stacking the stalks does slow the drying process -- the stalks in the bottom or middle will take longer to dry out. Against that, though, is the benefit that a stack reduces the risk that the plant material goes awol or takes root; and it offers a contained, ordered space to keep track of. However, if you have the space on your own property, if it's relatively flat and exposed to the sun (not in long grass; not on a steep hill, etc.); if the quantity of KW isn't large; if it's hot/sunny weather; and if you're there to keep a watchful eye, then it should be fine to just lay the stalks in a thin layer to let them dry before you then dispose of them.

Again, however, you should be very careful with roots and rhizomes which will take much longer to dry. It's better to separate roots/rhizomes from the stalks and deal with them separately.