Fallopia japonica

[Synonyms : *Fallopia compacta*, *Fallopia japonica* forma *colorans*, *Fallopia japonica* var. *compacta*, *Fallopia japonica* var. *hachidyoensis*, *Fallopia japonica* var. *uzenensis*, *Persicaria japonica*, *Pleuropterus cuspidatus*, *Pleuropterus zuccarinii*, *Polygonum compactum*, *Polygonum cuspidatum*, *Polygonum cuspidatum* var. *compactum*, *Polygonum cuspidatum* var. *spectabile*, *Polygonum hachidyoense*, *Polygonum japonicum*, *Polygonum reynoutria*, *Polygonum reynoutria* forma *colorans*, *Polygonum sieboldii*, *Polygonum zuccarinii*, *Reynoutria compacta*, *Reynoutria hachidyoensis*, *Reynoutria hachidyoensis* var. *terminalis*, *Reynoutria hachijoensis*, *Reynoutria hastata*, *Reynoutria henryi*, *Reynoutria japonica*, *Reynoutria japonica* var. *compacta*, *Reynoutria japonica* var. *hastata*, *Reynoutria japonica* var. *spectabilis*, *Reynoutria japonica* var. *terminalis*, *Reynoutria japonica* var. *uzenensis*, *Reynoutria uzenensis*, *Tiniaria japonica*]

JAPANESE KNOTWEED is an invasive deciduous perennial. Native to China, Japan and parts of Korea and Taiwan, it has bamboo-like stems with leaves that turn red in Autumn and minute, yellowish- or greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as Bushy knotweed, Chinese knotweed, *Cótkhi* (Vietnamese), *Cót khi cù* (Vietnamese), Crimson beauty, *Dièntháť* (Vietnamese), Donkey rhubarb, False bamboo, Fleece flower, Flowering bamboo, German sausage, Gypsy rhubarb, Hancock's curse, *Hoathuyélđan* (Vietnamese), *Hu zhang* (Chinese), *Itadori* (Japanese), Japanese bamboo, Japanese fleece flower, Japanese polygonum, *Japanintatar* (Finnish), *Japanischer Staudenknöterich* (German), *Japanse duizendknoop* (Dutch), *Japansk pileurt* (Danish), Japweed, Jointwood, *Knöterich* (German), Kontiki bamboo, Mexican bamboo, *Parkslide* (Swedish), Peashooter, *Pileurt* (Danish), *Pysen Saethwr* (Welsh), *Rdest ostrokończysty* (Polish), *Rdestowiec ostrokończysty* (Polish), *Renouée à feuilles en pointe* (French), *Renouée à feuilles pointues* (French), *Renouée du Japon* (French), Reynoutria, Reynoutria fleece flower, Sally rhubarb, *Shiro bana sakura tade* (Japanese), *Sieboldin tatar* (Finnish), Siebold's knotweed, *Spiess-Knöterich* (German), *Vooljas kirburohi* (Estonian), and *Vooljas pargitatar* (Estonian).

Any part or fragment of the root system (the roots can grow as deep as 6 feet and the underground stems are capable of reaching further than 60 feet), as well as fresh pieces of stem, can re-sprout.

Warning – the underground stems can be poisonous for some livestock.

It is not allowed to be planted or its growth encouraged in the wild either in Northern Ireland under the Wildlife (Northern Irleand) Order 1985 or on the British mainland (the latter under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981). Any waste material, such as that arising from cutting, mowing or excavation, must be disposed of according to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Duty of Care) Regulations. In some States (California, Washington, and Oregon and 32 others) in the United States and in some Provinces in Canada this plant has been declared a noxious or troublesome weed.

Japonica means 'of or from Japan'.

Young shoots (to 1 ft. tall) have been eaten as a cooked vegetable (like asparagus *Asparagus officinalis*) or an addition to soup or salad – and peeled mature stems can be prepared like

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garden rhubarb *Rheum* x *hybridum* or made into jam. For the Chinese the young shoots and the leaves have also offered a famine food.

North American Cherokee Indians ate the cooked leaves as a vegetable.

The seeds are eaten by songbirds and young shoots are enjoyed by cattle, horses, sheep and goats. They are often allowed to graze on the plants to help maintain some control over their growth.

In its native habitat it has been cultivated locally for the root bark which yields a yellow dye.

During the Second World War (1939-1945) the leaves offered a tobacco substitute.

South-eastern Asian experts view the plant purely as a vegetable.

Japanese knotweed was first described by the Dutch botanist, Maarten Houttuyn (1720-1798) in 1777 who called it *Reynoutria japonica*. Then for Western botanists and plant collectors it seems in effect to have disappeared into oblivion for about 50 years. In 1823 however Dr. Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866), the Bavarian physician and botanist, took up his post as a medical officer for the Dutch East India Company in Japan and during his six year stint managed to smuggle out two shipments of plants to Europe. One of these was Japanese knotweed which in 1825 was described afresh by Siebold and Joseph Gerhard Zuccarini (the German botanist from Munich) (1797-1848) who thought it was a new discovery and called it *Polygonum cuspidatum*. It was not until 1901 that botanists realised the two plants were one and the same. Meanwhile in 1825 the plant reached England from the European mainland and was introduced there as an ornamental. It is believed to have been introduced to the United States (from England) before 1890 and since then has been cultivated there not only as an ornamental and hedging plant but also as an agent for erosion control and landscape screening.

Where this perennial has been introduced and has become invasive it can form dense thickets and overwhelm the native wildlife. Not only does this have a serious effect on local flora and fauna but in some cases it can also cause a fire hazard. Some authorities point out a quite stunning fact. For Japanese knotweed to reproduce sexually male and female plants are needed – on the other hand vegetative reproduction can be achieved easily as any part or fragment of the usually huge root system as well as fresh pieces of stem, can re-sprout.. The plant introduced to England was female. In fact male plants are extremely rare in Europe and North America and scientists have now shown that virtually all of the millions and millions of plants now growing in England (let alone mainland Europe, and North America) are a single clone.

Medicinally, the roots have been used in Chinese medicine for treating some heart conditions – and the plant has also provided a tonic and a laxative. Recent research in the West has identified many varied valuable medicinal qualities in Japanese knotweed, including some that might be helpful in treating Alzheimer's disease. It is also a source of Vitamins A and C.

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