

Organic Control of Invasive Plants: Get Ready to Nip the Knotweed in 2021!



Japanese Knotweed appears to be one of the fastest-growing invasive plants taking over along the eastern seaboard, in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York. It is one of the most talked-about invasives among [CT Invasive Plant Working Group](#) members.

Easy to identify by its red stems, big heart-shaped leaves and racemes of small creamy blooms, *Fallopia japonica* also has been named *Polygonum cuspidatum* and *Reynoutria japonica*. Commonly called Mexican Bamboo because of its hollow stems, it was a sought-after landscape plant in the late 1800s.



Years later, it is taking over on disturbed soils – surely, you’ve noticed it encroaching on roadsides, riverbanks and riparian buffers.

Frustrating because of its prolific ability to sprout from almost any sized cutting and its tenaciously deep roots that survive our winters, this rapid grower quickly shades out native ecosystems.

Repeated mowings and weed whacking create more cuttings that help spread the plant. Glyphosate and other herbicides appear to stunt, but not always kill it, and their use may require Pesticide Applicator licenses near wetlands and waterways. Plus, many landowners prefer or require that synthetic chemicals not be used.

While honey bee keepers might appreciate Japanese Knotweed for its August pollen, it crowds out spring ephemerals, Lobelia, cattails, goldenrod, many native asters and ferns that support our North American native pollinators throughout the growing season.

And we're not alone – Japanese Knotweed has been declared the most pernicious weed in the United Kingdom, where mortgage bankers balk at financing purchases of knotweed-infested properties. The plant is pushing up building foundations, growing into houses, through tarmac and roads. Its roots have been found snaking through plumbing pipes, too.



Nip the Knotweed, a new campaign launched in 2020 in Connecticut, aims to teach people how to control Japanese Knotweed through “carbohydrate deprivation.” It’s a persistent, patient method of repeatedly cutting back to the base and removing the live stems and leaves to prevent new sprouts. Three to four years of repeated cutting have proven to be effective in Niantic Village, CT, allowing native seedbeds to recover and support native ecosystems.

The campaign was spearheaded by exasperated gardener and journalist Suzanne Thompson. Driving around Old Lyme the past few years, she noticed the knotweed taking over, but was always too busy to stop and cut it back.

Quarantined by COVID and with nowhere to go but outside, Thompson organized Nipping Parties of volunteers at key locations in town. The entire effort was bootstrapped, using free social media apps, word of mouth and some gentle arm-twisting of friends, neighbors and fellow gardening enthusiasts to come help chop knotweed.

The teams adopted two highly visible town sites as public demonstration plots: an established patch above the marsh behind Old Lyme Town Hall and a graveled parking lot at Lyme Art Association being overtaken by knotweed. Volunteers chopped in June, July and August, posting invitations and photos of Nipping Parties on Facebook.

Nip the Knotweed also encouraged others to follow along with chopping, bagging and disposing of invasive plant cuttings and posted a [brochure](#) on the town’s website. Their efforts in controlling invasive plants and public outreach helped Old Lyme achieve Bronze level certification in the state’s Sustainable CT program.



Volunteers at Old Lyme Town Hall



Volunteers at Lyme Art Association

Nip the Knotweed plans to be back in 2021, chopping back at more sites and reintroducing native plants that support native pollinators and beneficial insects.

This plant starvation method works well with Pollinator Pathway gardens on multiple fronts:

- knotweed doesn't have thorns or itchy sap and is easily identified,
- teams of all abilities can be engaged in cutting, bagging or solarizing steps,
- this avoids the use, exposure to and expense of chemical herbicides,
- native seedbeds in natural settings are reawakened,
- this is a great way to socialize, learn species identification and be out in nature.

Nip the Knotweed – how it works:

Chop back knotweed plants, at the base, three times between mid-May and mid-August. Make sure to kill off and properly dispose of the live cuttings. Smaller batches of invasive plants can be bagged and tossed into incinerated waste stream (all municipal trash in CT currently is incinerated.) Solarize and completely kill off larger batches of cuttings.

Hand pruners, gloves and plastic bags are all that's needed (plus bug spray!) for small jobs. Single-bladed bush-hogger tools work well on large stems. DO NOT mow or use weed whackers, they only spread fragments that will resprout.

DO NOT throw live Knotweed cuttings into mulch, compost piles or the woods, where they can resprout. Keep live cuttings out of moving water, they can drift and infest downstream.

DO NOT disturb or attempt to dig out the roots of mature plants, which are incredibly deep and spreading; cutting or breaking them only encourages resprouting and growth.

More....

The method was developed and has been field-tested by Petie Reed, an organic landscape designer, installer and gardener in Niantic. Ten years ago, Reed and fellow residents of Pine Grove Community started cutting back the knotweed that had overtaken a steep riverbank over Smith's Cove of Niantic River. The initial plot was 100 x 20 ft, and the knotweed was well-established and tall. Today, native plants are thriving there, and volunteers are reclaiming over one-half mile of coastal shoreline through organic control of invasive plants.

Reed has found that there are three key time windows to cut: 1) between early May to mid-June, 2) recut again by mid-July, and 3) complete the final cut when the plants are blooming, no later than mid-August. Once the plant is blooming, nutrients have already started translocating back into the roots to fuel next year's growth.



Native plants coming back at Lyme Art Association after one summer of Nip the Knotweed. Volunteers will continue chopping in 2021 and reintroduce additional native plants.

Like/Follow NiptheKnotweed on Facebook, and Suzanne will send you timely Nipping reminders in 2021. Plus, she is looking for brave souls and chefs to try Knotweed recipes! Contact her at niptheknotweed@gmail.com , 860-662-1531