

What does Japanese knotweed look like?

Knotweed is easy to recognise and can be identified at any time of the year using different parts of the plant. It can grow as a single plant or in a large area covering several thousand square metres (known as a 'stand' of knotweed).

Knotweed in full growth during the summer



The stem

- Each year's growth starts from about March onwards and the new young stems are green and dark red to purple in colour.
- They have very small pink/purple leaves that soon become green as they grow.
- Knotweed grows into a thick, dense thicket growing to 4m or 12 feet tall by the summer. It is the fastest growing plant in the country and can grow a few centimetres a day.
- The older and taller stems are hollow, light green and are covered with small purple spots and the 'branches' have a zig zag appearance. They are not woody like trees.
- They are divided into sections by obvious nodes making the stem look similar to bamboo. There is often water inside the stems above the nodes.
- The stem of a large plant can be nearly 5cm or 2 inches wide at the base.
- After the first frosts the stems die back becoming brown and hard and can stay upright for a few years before falling over.

Young shoots and stem in the spring



Summer stem showing node and purple spots



Zig zag branches



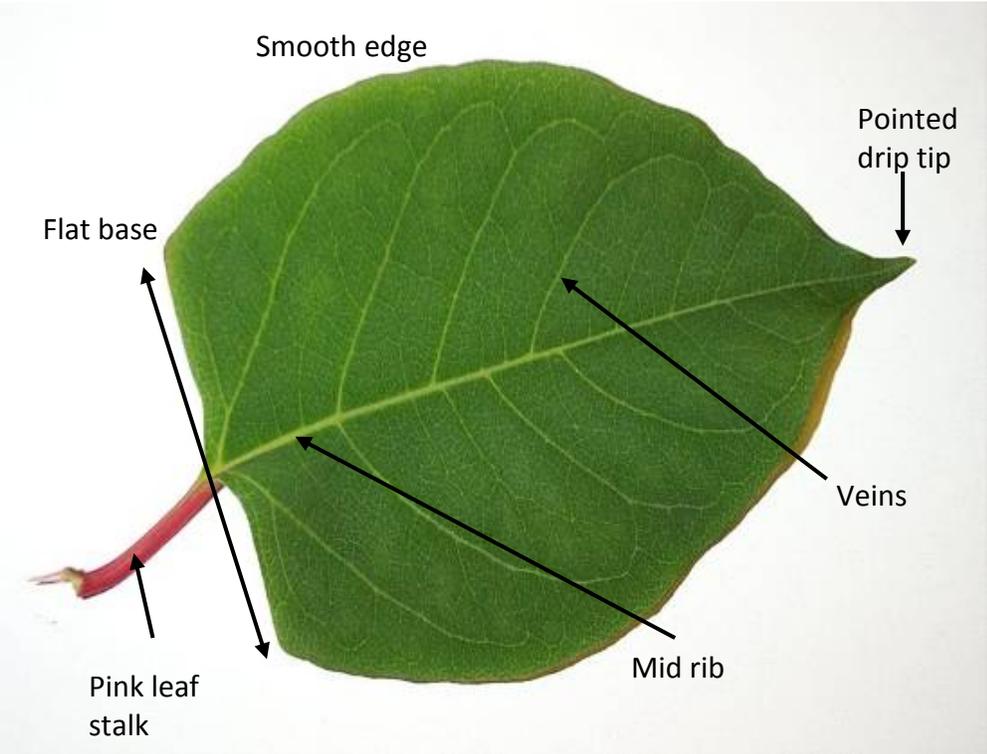
Winter stems



The Leaf

- During the spring and summer the living oval shaped leaves are a light and bright green colour with obvious veins and mid rib.
- They have a pointed 'drip tip', a flat base, a long pinky/red stalk and are attached to the stem in an alternate pattern. They are not attached to the stem opposite each other. The edges of the leaves are smooth.
- Sometimes they may have a yellow band caused by exposure to the weather.
- In the autumn the leaves become brown and drop to the ground forming a thick layer that acts as a mulch. They keep their shape even as a skeleton until they eventually rot down after a few years.
- Size varies usually between 10-15 cm long (maybe bigger in the shade)

Summer leaf



Dead winter leaf



The rhizome

- The root of the plant (which is actually an underground stem known as a rhizome), stores the plants' energy over the winter and sends up the new growth each spring. The new shoots grow from buds at the base of the previous year's stems and from the rhizome itself.
- Rhizomes are easy to identify as they are rust or carrot coloured on the inside and brown and gnarly on the outside. They can look similar to a very large piece of ginger.
- They can grow down to 2m (6 feet) deep and reach up to 7m (21 feet) away from the plant.
- A large and well established rhizome can grow to be the size of a person's leg and even a tiny piece can grow into a new plant.

Rhizome cross section showing the rust colour



A large piece of rhizome (with a CD case for scale)



The flowers and seeds

- The small flowers are formed in the late summer to autumn and are an attractive creamy/white colour. They are produced on stalks that can be up to 15 cm (6 inches) long.
- Bees and other insects are attracted to the flowers as they are produced relatively late in the year when most other plants have already flowered.
- The small brown seeds are only about 3-4mm (about ¼ inch) in size and are contained in thin papery case. They soon fall off the plant after flowering and may be found on the ground.
- The seeds rarely grow in this country as they are sterile.

Knotweed flowers

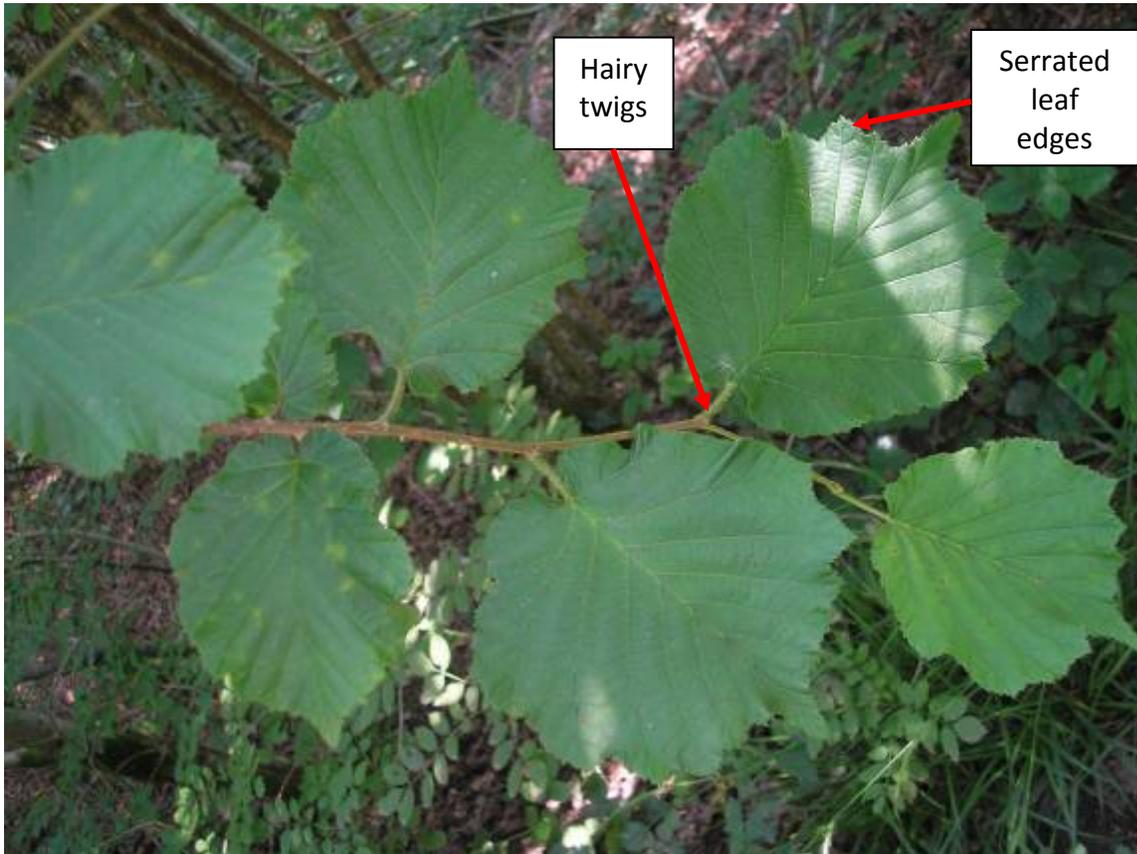


What else does it look like?

Although easy to identify knotweed can be confused with a few other plants and shrubs or trees. Trees can only really be confused after they have been cut and the new shoots re sprout.

- Hazel *Corylus avellana*

A common woodland tree that is often cut back (coppiced) to produce lots of small stems.



- Leaves have serrated edges like a saw
- Leaves and twigs are hairy
- Can grow into a small tree
- It is woody with bark
- Has catkins and produces nuts

- Alder *Alnus glutinosa*

A common tree that is usually found by water.



- Leaves have slightly serrated edges like a saw
- Leaves 'rounded' with no drip tip
- Can grow into a medium sized tree
- It is woody with bark
- Has catkins and small cones

- Dogwood *Cornus* species

There are many different types of this shrub and it is often seen in ornamental plantings with different colours of stem.



- Leaves are opposite each other on the stem
- Stems can be red, yellow or green
- Only grows to the size of a shrub or bush
- It is woody with bark
- Produces small black currant type fruits in late summer

- Pheasant berry *Leycesteria formosa*

Also known as flowering nutmeg and Himalayan honeysuckle this attractive shrub is common in gardens but is becoming more frequent in parks and woods.



- Leaves are opposite each other on the stem
- Leaves have small teeth along edges
- Stems are green
- Only grows to the size of a shrub or bush
- White flowers in the summer
- Produces small dark red berries that hang in clusters in late summer

- Hedge bindweed *Calystegia sepium*

A common climbing plant often thought of as a weed.



- Large white single flowers
- Climbs over plants
- Base of leaves not flat
- Thin twisty stem/stalk

- Horsetail *Equisetum arvense*

Although this plant does not look like Japanese knotweed it is common in gardens and is frequently misidentified. Also referred to as Mareetail, it looks similar to a small fir tree.

- In summer green shoots grow to about 60cm or 2 ft tall
- In spring shorter brown shoots have a cone at the end
- Dies back in the winter
- Very thin needle like green leaves in whorls around the stem which is ridged
- Forms a dense thicket and can cause damage to drives, tarmac etc
- Has a deep root (rhizome) system and is hard to control

Spring growth with 'cone'



Summer growth

