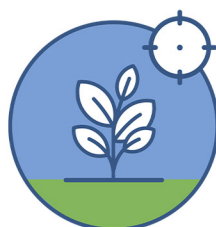


A homeowner's guide to Japanese knotweed



If you are a homeowner and have concerns about **Japanese knotweed**, understanding the latest guidance on this invasive weed is crucial in helping you decide what steps to take to protect your home and garden.

Dr Peter Fitzsimons, Technical Manager at national trade body, the Property Care Association (**PCA**), explains that changes to the way Japanese knotweed risks are assessed will have a big impact on homeowners, property professionals, estate agents, vendors, surveyors and lenders.

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Since 2012 property valuation surveyors have measured the impact of Japanese knotweed using risk categories contained in the RICS Information Paper 'Japanese knotweed and residential property.'

Now this guidance is being replaced with a 2022 Guidance note of the same name. The PCA have simultaneously published '**Japanese Knotweed - Guidance for Professional Valuers and Surveyors**' to help property professionals interpret the new scheme.

The 2022 RICS guidance is a response to new information about Japanese knotweed, the impact on buildings and amenity spaces, and proposes a new scheme for describing the impact of this invasive plant on homes and their values.

Crucially, it recognises that although Japanese knotweed is unlikely to damage houses and similar buildings with substantial foundations, it remains a significant physical and environmental risk, is difficult to control and needs to be managed in a systematic way to give confidence to property owners and lenders.

The new guidance states:

- Japanese knotweed can grow in and through walls, paths and driveways etc. but is unlikely to cause structural damage to buildings with substantial foundations – such as houses.
- The presence of Japanese knotweed should not be ignored
- Japanese knotweed can be managed, but professional advice is essential
- The new guidance will give mortgage lenders a better way to assess the actual impact of Japanese knotweed on a property
- The introduction of these new '**Management categories**' is a step forward for the residential property market

Here, PCA's Dr Fitzsimons answers the key questions homeowners may want to ask in relation to the new guidance:

Why has the guidance changed?

A Commons Select Committee report in 2019 suggested a 'more nuanced' approach for assessing risk should be adopted. Since then, new research into knotweed impacts on buildings plus studies on rhizome extension in soil suggested that the '7m rule' needed to be reviewed.

Does this mean Japanese knotweed is not a problem anymore?

No. Japanese knotweed is still viewed as detrimental to property AND to the environment and can be difficult/expensive to manage effectively.

The RICS guide recommends 'action' or 'management' in most cases where Japanese knotweed is causing damage or restricting use of amenity spaces, and banks/building societies will adopt the new scheme from March 23rd 2022 and use this to inform their lending policies.

But if Japanese knotweed is less destructive than first thought, why not ignore it?

Unlike an ash tree or woody shrub like buddleia, both of which can be easily controlled by cutting down/digging up/applying stump treatments, Japanese knotweed is notoriously hard to manage.

It has an extensive root/rhizome network meaning that cutting or shallow digging are rarely successful in the longer term.

The other reason is legal obligations arising from environmental legislation.

Allowing Japanese knotweed to spread beyond your property may be damaging to the local environment plus any and all soil arising which contains knotweed rhizome fragments is 'controlled waste' which can't be placed in green bins or compost.

It must be disposed of through licenced waste carriers.

So how do you manage Japanese knotweed?

With care and patience! As long as the area where the knotweed is growing can be kept free of disturbance, in many instances a minimum four to five-year herbicide spray and monitoring programme by a PCA member is suitable and guarantees can be backed-up by independent insurance.

If the area is earmarked for development (such as an extension, driveway or garden re-design involving earth movement) some degree of rhizome removal or relocation will be required and the best option (which may involve use of root barriers) can be selected once a Certificated Surveyor in Japanese Knotweed (CSJK) qualified surveyor has assessed the site.

If a valuation survey reports the presence of knotweed what are the consequences?

The new guidance doesn't come in to effect until after March 23rd, 2022. Until that date, the current/old scheme is still in force.

Both the new and old schemes may impact on valuation and mortgageability, but not all lenders have exactly the same policy.

The good news is that, even in the worst cases, a professional Japanese knotweed management plan, plus insurance-backed guarantee is usually able to satisfy lenders about future risks.

In summary, from March 2022 lenders will use a new metric to assess Japanese knotweed risks (management categories A-D) so that future lending decisions reflect the actual impact an infestation is having rather than its mere distance from a building or boundaries.

This will benefit many home-owners and purchasers.

If I have knotweed and will be selling my property this summer, what should I do?

Our advice would be the same if you are selling now or later. Get advice from a PCA invasive weed control member and consider starting a Japanese knotweed management plan before you issue instructions to your selling agent.

The ability to satisfy purchasers and lenders that there is already a plan in place is likely to make the property sale more straightforward, especially as some valuation/legal companies are trialling a scheme to request these details early on in the sales process.

The Property Care Association has produced a variety of guidance for both homeowners and professionals on how to deal with Japanese knotweed. These documents dovetail the new RICS Guidance. You can find them by visiting the '[homeowner section](#)' on the PCA website, or for professionals, you can visit the [Invasive Weed Document Library](#) where you will find a host of additional information.

More details about the PCA's Invasive Weed Control Group, including a video relating to Japanese knotweed, can be found at www.property-care.org/homeowners/invasive-weed-control

