

The HPS Horticultural Advisory Service

Focused primarily on hardy plants, the Society offers a personal Gardeners' Question Time service. Here are some more questions and answers.

From A:

I have growing in my garden two plants that are considered controversial – Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). I consider them to be attractive plants, which add to the beauty of my garden.

My neighbours have spoken to me about these plants and I would like to know whether it is actually an offence to grow and cultivate them within the confines of my own garden.

To A:

This is an unusual question. Usually, people are plotting to eradicate such plants. Gardeners have long appreciated them, although we now know better than deliberately to introduce them. As they already exist in your garden, the question is how to manage them correctly and within the law.

Himalayan balsam is considered a major weed throughout Britain, particularly troublesome on riverbanks. A prolific seeder, it can project its seeds up to 4 metres. It spreads extremely quickly in the wild and can form dense thickets, thus preventing our native marginals from growing and seeding and altering the character of our cherished and fragile wetland habitats.

The Balsaminaceae family goes by the folk name 'Touch-me-not', which refers to the explosive nature of its seed capsule when disturbed, which enables the plant to colonise up- as well as downstream.

The spurred flowers produce copious amounts of pollen over a long period. This is attractive to our pollinating insects and there is a concern that its presence may result in decreased pollination of other native plants.

The entire colony of balsam dies back completely during the winter months, leaving the soil bare and liable to erosion.

Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) (Jk) was described by the Victorian gardener William Robinson as making 'large and noble

tufts of lively green, which increase in beauty from year to year'. Never was a truer word spoken. This is a stately plant with a commanding presence, but it also has an alarming capacity to take over large areas of land with impressive rapidity.

We are lucky to be able take our holidays in the Western Isles of Scotland, and every year we make our pilgrimage north via Fort William. This bustling town, at the base of Ben Nevis, is situated on the shores of Loch Linnhe and provides magnificent mountain scenery. The banks of the Loch, however, are now dominated by knotweed, which has altered the ecological balance of the area.



©TP Knotweed



©TP Knotweed

Japanese knotweed – its beauty and danger.



The root cause of the problem.

This rhizomatous plant reproduces from tiny fragments of root; it has been known to grow through walls, tarmac and even concrete.

To answer your question accurately, I consulted the Environment Agency. They tell me it is not an offence

for you to grow these invasive, non-native plants in your own garden, but you absolutely must not cause them to grow on anyone else's property or indeed in the wild. Interestingly, you can move them within the confines of your own land, but

I would advise great caution with regard to roots and seeds. Please be advised that you could be prosecuted or given a community protection notice for causing a nuisance if your plants stray next door.

With this in mind, it will be necessary for you to deadhead your balsam well before it sets seed. I'm sure that you must be attempting to prevent the knotweed from taking over your garden by regularly digging up sections of the plant. Under The Environmental Protection Act 1990, any Jk contaminated soil or plant material that you want to dispose of is likely to be classified as 'controlled waste'. It must either be burned on site or taken to a licenced landfill by a knotweed specialist who holds a waste carrier's licence. 🌿

Editor's note: Tom Payne, MD of a leading UK Japanese knotweed removal & treatment company, adds: There is no denying that Jk is a very attractive plant in summer, but if there's any in your garden it will be a problem if you wish to sell your home.

To sell a property, you have to complete the Law Society's TA6 Property Information Form; the answers to the question 'Is the property affected by Jk?' are Yes, No, or Not Known.

If Yes, you need to state whether there is a Jk management plan in place, and supply a copy of it. The value of your property will be significantly reduced until a programme is in place. Also, without an accredited, specialist herbicide treatment programme with a 10-year insurance-backed guarantee, the majority of mortgage lenders will refuse to lend.

Jk can be eradicated, but choosing to grow it in your garden is likely to be more trouble than it's worth. For more information see www.tpknottweed.com

You may find the answer to your gardening questions from members of your Local Group, or in the Society's on-line horticultural library, or use the HPS Advisory Service. The Service is free, and the Society's experts will try to answer your gardening questions, especially those concerning the use and growing of hardy perennials. They will try to respond to you quickly, but please bear in mind that specialist questions may take some time to research.

Email your question to: advisory@hardy-plant.org.uk