



JAPANESE KNOTWEED (POLYGONIUM CUSPIDATUM)

PLANT FACTS

Japanese knotweed, originally introduced to the United States as an ornamental plant in the late 1800s, is now found in (at least) 39 states over a wide range of sites. It is an **upright, herbaceous, perennial plant which can grow over 10 feet tall** when mature, though in urban areas they are more likely to be smaller as they either grow up through cracks in sidewalks or are repeatedly cut down as they invade roadsides. However, knotweed is a **runner**, meaning new clumps of **hollow, reddish, bamboo-like stems** are likely to keep popping up from its **extensive network of underground root stocks called rhizomes**. Knotweed's **broad green leaves** grow to be roughly 6 inches long and 4 inches wide, but the real star of the show are the **lacy white clusters of tiny flowers** that start blooming in late summer. The blossoms are beloved by many insects such as butterflies, beetles, wasps, and bees -- in fact, knotweed is valued by some beekeepers as an important source of nectar for honeybees at a time of year when little else is flowering, producing a mild-flavored version of **buckwheat** honey (knotweed and buckwheat are in the same family)!

A DREADABLE EDIBLE

Knotweed tolerates a wide variety of soils and growing conditions from sun to shade, but it grows especially well in **moist areas with plenty of sun**. It is **very hardy and tends to take over** when unmanaged, which explains why it's **listed by the World Conservation Union as one of the world's worst invasive species!** In cities such as Philadelphia, knotweed spreads from **discarded cuttings and neglected garden plantings**. Its deeply embedded rhizomes make knotweed particularly difficult to get rid of without the use of toxic pesticides, but luckily it has several culinary and medicinal uses that make it possible (even desirable) to **"harvest with abandon"** come spring as a natural control method. **Early spring shoots and leaves are edible** and have been described as a cross between asparagus and rhubarb, while the roots contain the highest known concentration of resveratrol in plants—the same powerful antioxidant found in red grape skin and red wine. Mature shoots are much tougher and need to be peeled before eating and can be eaten **raw, grilled, sautéed, pickled and more**. Knotweed can also be used in pies, soups, aspics, sauces, jams, and chutneys, as many high-end restaurants are doing as they embrace the trend for foraged foods.

PURÉE RECIPE

Because it can be **easily stored for later use**, making knotweed into a **purée** opens the door to many different possibilities, whether you eat it sweetened as a simple and delicious dessert or incorporate it into more complex recipes. Wash some **young, thick-stemmed stalks** and remove any tips and leaves before **chopping into pieces** and **cooking** in a large pot with **just enough water** to keep them from scorching and about **3/4 cups of sugar for every 5 cups of stems**. Once the knotweed is completely soft and has given off a lot of water, finish the process in a **blender and refrigerate** or freeze. *Enjoy!*

