Beacon
Invasive Plant Intelligence

Authored by leading invasive plant experts
Environet

Homeowners are opting for excavation of knotweed over herbicide

Knotweed growing from a retaining wall

A decade ago, almost three quarters of our residential Japanese knotweed customers chose the least expensive option to deal with their infestation: ***herbicide treatment****. Today, that number has fallen to 36%, with almost two thirds of our customers now opting for 'belt and braces' excavation.*

We look at the reasons behind this change and explore what this means for homeowners and the professionals advising them, who must weigh up treatment costs and outcomes alongside the future saleability and value of an affected property.

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Treatment options on residential properties

There are several methods for dealing with Japanese knotweed, but two are commonly used on residential properties by professionals.

Firstly, herbicide treatment, whereby the plant is sprayed with chemicals over two or three growing seasons (years). The above-ground growth will be killed, but the plant's rhizome system often remains dormant but alive beneath the ground and could regrow – particularly if the ground is disturbed. Secondly, excavation, which removes all trace of the plant - including roots and rhizome - from the ground within a matter of days. If carried out properly, the chance of regrowth is minimal.

Depending on the circumstances, a dual approach, involving a combination of both herbicide and removal, may be appropriate.

Evidence of previously treated rhizome, remaining viable

The pros and cons of herbicide versus excavation

	Herbicide	Excavation
Time	✗ Takes at least 2 years to complete	✓ Instant results
Cost	✓ Lower costs	✗ Higher costs
Regrowth	✗ Higher risk of dormancy and regrowth	✓ Minimal chance of regrowth
Property value	✗ Greater impact on property value	✓ Lower impact on property value
Disruption	✓ Minimal disruption to garden	✗ Greater disruption to garden
Future use	✗ Future use heavily impacted	✓ No restrictions on future use or development

Knotweed overtaking a residential garden

Defined switch in trends

Depending on the method chosen, 5m2 of knotweed typically costs between £3,000 and £12,000 to treat, with herbicide costing around one third of the price of excavation. Cost has always been, and continues to be, a significant factor in the decision making of customers, but in the last 5 years it appears to have become a less dominant factor.

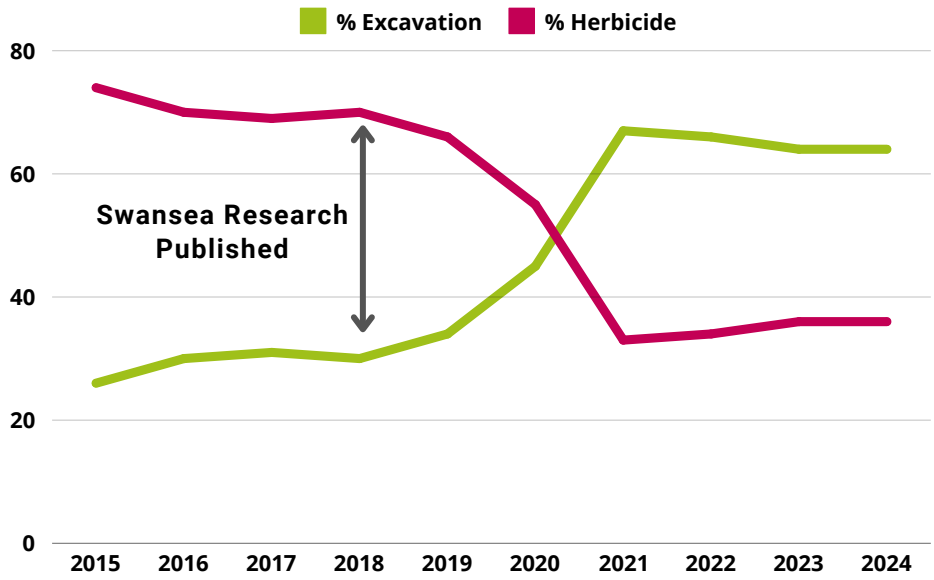
So what's changed?

Swansea University research marked a turning point

Analysis of our data over a ten-year period between 2015 and 2024, shows a clear trend away from herbicide and towards removing knotweed. But it was the publication of research by Swansea University in 2018 that marked the turning point. Researchers concluded that knotweed can't be killed by herbicide, which had long been the preferred method of tackling the plant.

Homeowners began opting for excavation in greater numbers, a trend which was accelerated further by the pandemic in 2020, when the property market was much busier than normal and there was a greater urgency to move. This meant sellers wanted their knotweed problems dealt with as quickly as possible.

Environet residential treatment programme instructions % herbicide vs excavation Sept 2015 - Sept 2024



Changes to the RICS Guidance had little impact

In 2022, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) relaxed their official guidance for surveyors assessing properties with knotweed, promoting long term control through herbicide treatment as a more appropriate goal than eradication. But our data suggests homeowners are unconvinced.

Despite the lower initial costs of herbicide treatment, the plant's rhizome remains present beneath the ground and it's impossible to verify that it has been killed, making the property less appealing to buyers and potentially having a greater impact on its value. While herbicide can be effective in certain cases, in our view there are often very good reasons to make eradication the goal – and by settling for 'control' the bar is lowered for the sale of a smaller initial cost.

Herbicide is particularly inappropriate where the plant's location could impact neighbouring properties and be subject to potential legal claims, or on more valuable properties where the diminution of value justifies the higher cost of removal.

> *"Instead of being encouraged to pursue herbicide treatment in response to the changed RICS guidance, homeowners have moved in greater numbers towards a 'belt and braces' knotweed removal, where every part of the plant is removed from the ground with no chance of regrowth.*
>
> *"When you consider the risks of knotweed which has been left in the ground suddenly regrowing, or worse, spreading next door and opening you up to a legal case from your neighbour, it's understandable that homeowners are willing to pay more to make sure it's gone for good – and to reassure future buyers."*
>
> **Emily Grant,**
> **Director of Operations**

Conclusion

Even if knotweed has been removed, homeowners still have an obligation to declare it when they sell their property – and this is a major factor in their decision making. YouGov research commissioned by Environet shows that homebuyers are far more reassured if knotweed has been removed from the ground of a property they wish to buy. Only 20% of people would be comfortable buying a property that had been herbicide treated for knotweed, compared to 50% who would be comfortable buying a property where a knotweed infestation had been excavated.

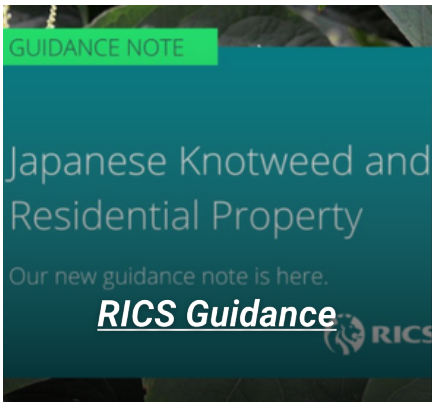
The vested interest of homeowners in preserving the value of their property, often their most valuable asset, means that demand for excavation is likely to continue to grow.


Surveyor assessing knotweed

Further information


Guide to Residential Solutions


Valuation Impact Calculator



RICS Guidance

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