

Lesser Knotweed

(*Persicaria campanulata*)



Family name: Polygonaceae (Knotweed family)

Common name: Lesser Knotweed, Asiatic Knotweed, Bellflower Smartweed



Lesser Knotweed (*Persicaria campanulata*) is a perennial plant native to Asia, known for its arching stems, bell-shaped flowers, and ability to spread rapidly.

In Ireland, it is considered an invasive species, particularly in moist habitats such as woodlands and riverbanks. The plant reproduces through seeds and vegetative propagation, forming dense clumps that can outcompete native vegetation. Effective management involves mechanical removal, herbicide use, and preventative measures to control its spread.

Description - Lesser Knotweed (*Persicaria campanulata*) is a perennial herbaceous plant that forms dense patches, with arching stems and bell-shaped flowers.

It can become invasive in suitable climates due to its rapid spread. Key characteristics include:



Height: The plant typically grows to a height of 50 to 100 cm, although it can sometimes reach up to 1.5 metres under favourable conditions.

Leaves: The leaves are narrowly ovate or elliptical, with a pointed tip, measuring 5-12 cm long. The margins are finely toothed, and the leaf surfaces are often covered in fine hairs, giving them a slightly velvety texture.



Flowers: Produces small, bell-shaped flowers that are usually pale pink or white, appearing in clusters from mid-summer to early autumn. The flowers grow on upright spikes at the end of arching stems.

Fruit: The plant produces small, dry, single-seeded fruits (achenes) that can be dispersed by wind or water.



Stem: The stems are arching and often reddish in colour, with a slightly woody base.

They are capable of rooting at the nodes when they come into contact with soil, facilitating vegetative spread.

Root: The root system consists of fibrous roots and short rhizomes, which enable the plant to form dense clumps and spread vegetatively.



Habitat - Lesser Knotweed is native to Asia, particularly in regions such as the Himalayas.

It has been introduced to various parts of the world as an ornamental plant and has become naturalised in some areas. Its preferred habitats include:

- Woodlands and Forest Edges: Grows well in partial shade to full sun, often found at the edges of woodlands.
- Riverbanks and Wetlands: Thrives in moist, well-drained soils, frequently appearing along streams, rivers, and other wetland areas.
- Gardens and Parks: Used in landscaping for ground cover and has escaped cultivation to establish in nearby natural habitats.

The plant prefers cool, temperate climates and moist, rich soils but can adapt to various conditions.

Status in Ireland - In Ireland, Lesser Knotweed is recognised as an invasive species that poses a threat to native habitats, particularly in woodlands, riparian zones, and other moist environments. Its ability to spread rapidly through vegetative reproduction allows it to form dense stands, outcompeting native vegetation.

Reproduction and Spread - Lesser Knotweed spreads both through seed dispersal and vegetative propagation:

- Seed Dispersal: The seeds can be dispersed by wind and water, allowing the plant to colonise new areas, especially along watercourses.
- Vegetative Spread: The plant can spread through rooting of stems at the nodes and short rhizomes, which produce new shoots and help the plant form dense clumps.

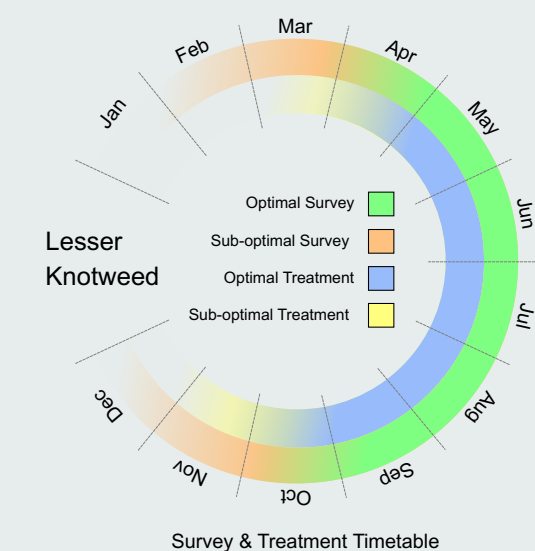
Management and Control - Controlling Lesser Knotweed requires a combination of mechanical, chemical, and cultural methods:

- Mechanical Control: Regular cutting or mowing can help reduce growth, though it must be repeated frequently to be effective. Digging out the roots may be necessary for smaller infestations, ensuring that all root fragments are removed.

- Chemical Control: Herbicides can be used to manage large infestations, especially when applied to young, actively growing plants.

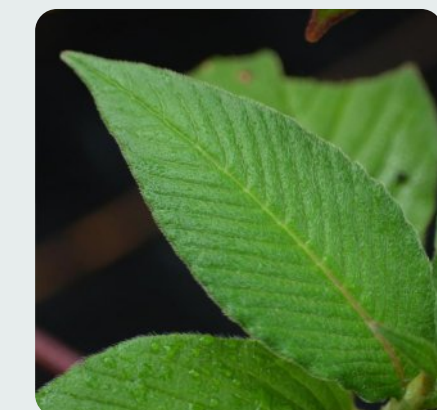
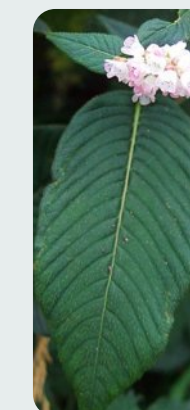
Repeated treatments may be needed due to the plant's resilience.

- Preventative Measures: Preventing the spread of seeds and vegetative fragments is crucial for controlling the plant's spread, especially near watercourses.



Ecological Impact - Lesser Knotweed can have several ecological impacts, especially in areas where it becomes dominant:

- Competition with Native Species: Forms dense stands that outcompete native plants for light, water, and nutrients.
- Alteration of Soil Structure: The plant's root system can change soil conditions, potentially affecting native flora and fauna.
- Impact on Waterways: In riparian areas, it can stabilise stream banks, but its dense growth can also restrict access to water for wildlife and alter the flow of water.



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