

## › A KNOTTY PROBLEM

**A Surrey company is celebrating two decades helping gardeners to remove a weed which threatens to take a stranglehold on the countryside.**

Environet UK, which has its headquarters in Woking, has developed a unique patented formula to remove Japanese Knotweed and has just started offering an indemnity policy to pest-free homes, to cover the cost of removal should it return.

The company was set up in 1996 by environmental scientist Nic Seal, offering consultancy to the property sector, especially where the land was contaminated. It now employs 14 people at Woking, with a team of sales and operational staff across the UK.

Nic explained the origins of the plant, how to recognise it and what to do if you spot it: “Japanese knotweed is relatively easy to identify, once you know what to look for. Asparagus-type shoots emerge in early March/April, which quickly grow into stems with green heart-shaped leaves. The main stems are very bamboo-like, usually green, with pinkish speckles. The stems are hollow and grow almost upright. The leaves grow alternately along the stems, giving a very distinctive zig-zag appearance. By summer, these stems are up to three metres high and are covered in creamy white flowers. During the winter, the leaves fall, the canes die back and turn brown. Although they remain standing over the winter, the underground rhizome system remains alive.”

Nic stressed that it was important to identify the weed throughout the year and said Environet specialists were happy to help in any season. Knotweed is particularly rampant beside waterways, railways and on brownfield sites. It stifles flora and fauna and can damage property if allowed to take hold.

Official records show that the weed is now so prevalent in the UK that it features within every six-mile square patch of the country – except on the Orkneys.



› Nic Seal among the knotweed.  
Inset: Spraying in progress