

W INVASIVE Weeds

JAPANESE KNOTWEED
REED CANARYGRASS
HIMALAYAN BLACKBERRY

Most non-native, invasive plants do not cause problems in their native habitats in other parts of the world. When they are established in disturbed environments here in the Pacific Northwest, however, they can have dramatic impacts on stream health.

These aggressive imports take advantage of our moist, rich soils and gentle climate. They seek places where the local ecology has been disturbed, such as around homes, in yards and pastures, along roadways, and along lowland streams.

Three nasty plants

Three invasive plants, in particular, can damage streams and important streamside vegetation: reed-canarygrass, Japanese knotweed, and Himalayan blackberry.

These plants grow in tall dense stands, out-competing and displacing native understory vegetation. They prevent the growth of young trees, which results in gradual thinning and displacement of floodplain forests. As old trees die, there are no young trees to replace them. In streamside forests where short-lived species such as black cottonwood and red alder dominate, thinning and displacement can occur quite rapidly.



Himalayan blackberries and reed-canarygrass have nearly obliterated the streamside forest along this salmon stream.



A dense field of reed canarygrass stands where a diverse streamside forest once stood.

Weed control and removal

Although some conventional treatments of these invasive plant species rely on herbicides, it is best to avoid herbicide use near water whenever possible. For some plants, such as Japanese knotweed and reed-canarygrass, herbicides may be no more effective than manual or mechanical removal.

All three are sun-loving species that can be controlled over the long-term by establishing a tree canopy to shade them out. Stream restoration professionals often eradicate thick stands of these plants through repeated mowing and planting evergreen trees to provide dense shade

With tenacity and patience, it is possible to remove invasive weeds without herbicides. There are numerous success stories. If you decide to use herbicides, follow the directions. Keep all herbicides away from water. Not doing so could have legal consequences. Use the least amount necessary. More is not better – more can be dangerous! Remember also, that different plants respond to herbicides differently at different times of year.

Reed-canarygrass

Reed-canarygrass is extremely troublesome in streams and in



*Your local watershed steward can help you
identify invasive streamside weeds and
determine the best way to remove them.
Call 425-388-3464 for information.*



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wet areas where it displaces native vegetation and wildlife. It grows up to eight feet tall and forms dense mats of roots and stems, preventing other plants from establishing. It can tolerate being submerged for months at a time, and can grow across streambeds.

Japanese knotweed

Japanese knotweed grows in dense stands, up to eight feet tall, outcompeting and displacing native understory vegetation. It even displaces blackberries! In its native environment, Japanese knotweed colonizes disturbed soils, often appearing on volcanic slopes after an eruption.

On local streams, it spreads along banks and bars scoured clean by water. It also spreads along roads and trails. Although Japanese knotweed produces seeds, it primarily spreads by its aggressive rhizomes (which can even sprout through asphalt paving), and by stem fragments that take root. Care is required when cutting knotweed near streams since fragments that fall into flowing water can take root and start a new colony downstream.

Himalayan blackberry

Himalayan blackberry is a familiar villain to many landowners. Unchecked, it forms dense thickets over ten feet high that prevent growth of other streamside plants. Although the thickets provide shade (and luscious berries), they provide little protection against soil erosion and minimal wildlife habitat.

Fortunately, Himalayan blackberry is the easiest of these three weeds to eradicate. Repeated cutting of its stems several times each year eventually depletes the roots of energy and the plants die. With a little hard work, dense blackberry thickets can be eliminated without herbicides in two to three years. If you want faster results, cut your blackberries to the ground and dig-up the potato-like tuber that grows just below the surface.



A field of invasive Japanese knotweed where streamside willows stood just five years ago.



Dedicated volunteers plant trees where a blackberry thicket was machine-cut just two weeks earlier.



Acres of blackberries conceal a salmon stream. Despite abundant vegetation, blackberries do little to control erosion, allowing silty water to harm salmon and cause downstream damage.



Assistance is available for streamside landowners to remove invasive streamside weeds and replace them with trees. Call 425-388-3464 for information.

Photos courtesy Stilly-Snohomish Fisheries Enhancement Task Force



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