

Destroying Japanese knotweed

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Nikki Jarman



Emily Grant is Environet UK's Regional Manager for the South West

Emily Grant, regional manager for Environet UK, tells Devon Life she'd like to eradicate Japanese knotweed from the UK

How did you get to where you are today?

After A-levels I took a gap year and volunteered doing bio-mapping in the Philippines where my passion for the environment flourished. I read Environmental Sciences at Plymouth and then a Master's in Education for Sustainability through distance learning at London South Bank. I started my career in a Health, Safety and Environmental consultancy in Plymouth, focusing on asbestos. I travelled the whole of the South West offering consultancy to both private and commercial clients. I have worked on contaminated land projects, environmental management plans and waste management and more recently, I have managed a department of 18 in a busy asbestos consultancy, working with clients such as the NHS and MoD.



Japanese knotweed is extremely invasive when it takes hold

Why Japanese knotweed?

Like asbestos, Japanese knotweed is a blight that needs dealing with professionally. I enjoy the challenges dealing with knotweed brings and the satisfaction of looking after our countryside and assuring the future of our built environment.

Sum yourself up in three words?

Approachable, determined, caring.

What gets you out of bed in the morning?

My one-year-old normally, and all the adventures she brings!

What's the best bit of kit you have in your day to day job?

There is no smart answer here, it's my phone – I would be lost without it! But I love it when the operations team come onsite with our Xtract™ machine. It's the most environmental method of getting rid of Japanese knotweed on development sites. For me that ticks all the right boxes.

On a cold and frosty morning, wouldn't you prefer to be in a nice warm office?

No – I love the outdoors, whatever the weather!

What do you love most about your job?

It has to be hearing the relief in people's voices when you tell them that their problem can be solved. It can be so stressful to have a property sale/purchase or a building project jeopardised by the presence of Japanese knotweed. I also love the fact that I can combine my technical and intellectual learning with being out and about in a beautiful part of the country.

Who is winning the battle between Japanese knotweed and the developer?

That depends on the developer – knotweed will always have the last laugh if it isn't treated correctly. It seems that improved awareness and the realisation that you can't mess with knotweed is persuading more and more developers to do the right thing and call in the experts.

Destroy or control: if it was up to you...?

DESTROY! Japanese knotweed is out of control in the UK. In my view eradication is the better option, whether that's killing it completely with herbicides or excavating it. Either way, Environet will guarantee that it's gone.

Victorians - were they victors or villains in their quest for bringing back plants from around the world?

Both to a degree. There was an awful lot of ignorance in terms of the potential impact of what they were doing, however they have transformed our British gardens and made them what they are today. They were passionate pioneers and we have them (and their commissioners) to thank for our botanical gardens and arboretums. Research potential through their specimens is also enormous, for example the ability to track climate change through plant flowering records.

What advice do you have for those seeking to get rid of Japanese knotweed?

Always seek the advice of a reputable professional. There is a lot of rubbish out there on the internet.

Does the government do enough to tackle the problem of Japanese knotweed?

I'm not sure there is anything more they can do. These things are often best dealt with at grass roots. I think education, awareness and people understanding their existing rights and obligations are the wider issues.

What, in your opinion, is the next big thing to affect your industry in the fight against Japanese knotweed?

The new Japanese Knotweed indemnity insurance which has recently been launched by Countrywide Legal Indemnities. This will provide a great deal of reassurance that any knotweed problem, appearing in the future, will be tackled professionally at no further cost to the home owner or the lender. Knowing the knotweed risk can now be covered by simple low cost insurance should also make the conveyancing process far simpler and provide peace of mind to home owners.

What's on your reading list?

Mainly children's stories at the moment – there isn't much time for reading anything else.

What's your poison?

Real ale or Plymouth G&T.

What are the ingredients of your success?

Passion for the work I do, determination and a good work ethic.

If you could wave a magic wand, what would happen?

My three-bed terrace would turn into a country pile!

Emily Grant is Environet UK's Regional Manager for the South West. She can be contacted on 01932 584937 or Mob: 07776 241059 or by emailing emily.grant@environetuk.com. You can find out more about the work of Environet UK Ltd at environetuk.com