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Surrender in the war on knotweed menace

By Anna Verdon

THE Government has been forced to give up the fight against Japanese knotweed in Britain. As well as ruining gardens the plant, which grows to seven feet tall, can damage brick walls and the foundations of buildings. After decades trying to tackle the problem, the Government now says knotweed is too expensive to destroy.

With annual costs running at £1.5 billion, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister George Rouse said: "There are no plans to attempt a national eradication because the cost would be prohibitively expensive and likely to be uneconomic given the widespread distribution of the species."

Costly

Knotweed roots can grow to more than 10ft deep but it cannot be dug out as any roots left in readily regrow. Herbicides have shown results in eradicating the weed, but the process is slow and costly.

Roger Wilson, of RWS Pest and Weed Control in Stockport, said: "It's on site you will need to have a property risk assessment and a management plan needs to be put in place which is usually a five-year programme."

"There will be a range of options but it usually involves two to three years of treatment and then the site needs monitoring for around two years." In 2011, hopes of a biological control were raised when thousands of Japanese wasps were released into the wild. However, Mr Rouse said only "small populations" of the bug had survived.

Though this summer will see a new release programme in some areas, homeowners will be left alone to fight the weed which can make it hard to get a mortgage.

Owners can be forced to pay £3,000 to eradicate it and, in extreme cases, houses can be handed out to those failing to stop the spread - along with a fine of up to £2,500.

Knotweed takes over in Cornwall and, right, a council control sign



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