

Alien Species Quiz set for Whitchurch Fete 3/9/2005

The following questions set by WoTHabs member John Southey were posed to visitors to our stall at the Fete – the answers are shown below. You may be surprised by some of the facts & figures! To make it easier, there were specimens of each of the plants displayed on the stall.

Questions

Which alien plant species growing in the UK can:-

1. **Grow 200 mm / day**
2. **Reproduce from small fragments**
3. **Is illegal to plant in the wild**
4. **Causes painful blisters**
5. **Can penetrate buildings**
6. **Propagates by seed**

Answers

1. **Floating pennywort** (*H. ranunculoides*)

The Environment agency leaflet quotes "double its wet weight in as little as 3 days", one web site quoted 200 mm / day, no doubt length of root.

2. **Parrots Feather** (*Myiophyllum aquaticum*)

Floating pennywort

Australian swamp stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*) (also known as New Zealand pygmy weed)

Japanese knotweed (3 varieties)

Consider these as equivalent to Bindweed. The smallest root fragment, quantified in the EA leaflet on knotweed is the size of a little fingernail, and in general advice on others of "Don't shatter, spread, or attempt mechanical control", is a precis of the dangers of vegetative reproduction. In addition, Japanese knotweed and Australian swamp stonecrop can reproduce from the growth nodes at each leaf junction if the stem is shattered.

3. Only Giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed are named in the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. This shows how legislation is behind the times because Parrots feather and Australian swamp stonecrop even today are still available for sale in aquatic centres.
4. **Giant hogweed** (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

Considered a public health hazard. Has toxins in the sap and the small hairs on the plant, the hairs can penetrate, light clothing. Skin irritation is

accelerated by exposure to sunlight and can lead to years of skin discolouration or permanent sensitivity to dermatitis.

5. **Japanese knotweed**

6. **Giant hogweed**

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) or Indian balsam.

Thankfully these are the only 2 plants in the quiz that regularly produce seed. This makes the control measure of preventing flowering for several years a viable measure. (Floating pennywort has been known to produce seed, but this is rare).

Further information on the internet. Note that regulations may have changed since this quiz was set in 2005.