

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Japanese Knotweed

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Invasive species are plants and animals that are not from here but have been introduced and are thriving in the absence of their natural controls, to the detriment of our native species. Their impacts is especially notable in the Southern Appalachians, as they're responsible for the loss of the American chestnut, the current decline of hemlock trees, and patches of kudzu across the region. Japanese knotweed is another.

It's a cane-like shrub, reaching heights from three to twelve feet. Its above-ground stems die back each winter, but the below-ground stem, or rhizome, can live for decades. It's another plant that was brought here from Asia on purpose, as an ornamental, but also, like kudzu, for erosion control. It isn't too hard to find Japanese knotweed on the banks of Southern Appalachian Rivers, where it can easily colonize scoured areas and can be extremely hard to eradicate.

It's especially insidious in that a new plant can grow from a tiny piece of stem, which means taking a machete to a patch would simply result in many more plants. This easy vegetative reproduction means it can spread down river corridors as plant parts are carried for miles; or along road corridors, where mowing can produce and spread plant parts along road shoulders. Chemical control is probably the best option, but if pulled, the pullings must be put in a sealed plastic bag, and the pulling must extract the underground rhizome or be repeated until the rhizome dies.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.