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THE TERRIBLE 10

**A guide to local noxious
and toxic plants**

BY RON BALDWIN

The Terrible 10 lists the most noxious and even toxic plants threatening the North Coast's native ecosystems. Many offenders have been here for a century or more. Most escaped from cultivated garden environments. They readily form exclusive monocultures, clog waterways and block the sun to native plants.

Invasive plants have always been with us in the Northwest. These top 10 are among the most visible enemies of indigenous vegetation.

Japanese knotweed — *Reynoutria japonica*

Since its introduction to the west in the 1850s, Japanese knotweed has become a scourge of Europe (26 countries) and the U.S. (36 states). It grows to 8 feet and spreads through tiny rhizomes in the soil. Once started, experts say, it is beyond the average gardener's ability to eradicate it. Some stands take up to 10 years of the most poisonous herbicides to eradicate. It's edible but not widely used.



Photos by King County Noxious Weed Program
Japanese knotweed.

Scotch broom — *Cytisus scoparius*

This is likely the most visible of all the baddies in the Northwest, especially on the North Coast. Bright yellow pea-like flowers burst from the grayish-green plant, which can reach 10 feet. It colonizes any empty space between native plants and eventually takes over. Eradication is problematic since it reproduces by thousands of black, oily seeds that are viable in the soil for up to 50 years.



Scotch broom.

Himalayan or Armenian blackberry
— *Rubus armenicus*

The Northwest is covered with this cane-berry shrub. Its dark green leaves close out light for native plants. The canes can reach 40 feet. It produces huge, impenetrable brambles that annoy farmers and gardeners alike. It's controlled by digging up the rhizomes, often with the help of a bulldozer. On the positive side, its berries are delicious. Brambles have been known to cover up to 10 acres of productive pasture in as little as five years.



Himalayan blackberry.

English ivy — *Hedera helix/Hedera hibernica*

Photographs of great buildings covered in ivy are everywhere in history. In a controlled effort, hederas can be used as a decorative plant but, unchecked, it can destroy trees, buildings and fences, slowly ripping them apart. It reproduces while still juvenile and spreads by vegetative stem growth. In maturity, it produces thousands of viable seeds. Both humans and animals are sensitive to the oils these plants produce. Forest lands near human habitation everywhere in the Northwest are threatened by

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