

This weedy plan bugs me

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FOREIGN "jumping plant lice" could be released in the UK to control the invasive Japanese knotweed, under plans being considered by the Government.

They are considering the importation of a sap-sucking insect to tackle the weed, because using conventional means - such as weedkiller, presumably - might cost as much as £2 billion.

But the bargain basement scheme, hatched after five years of painstaking and costly research, to let **Aphalara itadori** loose is based only on initial investigation.

Boffins have let the insect lunch on 88 plants to see what takes its fancy.

Japanese Knotweed is top of the mite's menu, although it seems the creature is partial to a number of similar plants, too.

Researchers say the insect - it is officially a psyllid - would potentially target only a few other closely-related non-native species of knotweed if it were released in the UK.

Unscathed they say they think that that our indigenous wildlife and vegetation would be unscathed although, of course, they can't be sure.

What if the creature decides to opt for the a la carte rather than the set menu? But let's fast forward for a moment here.

Imagine that the insect has been released and wreaked havoc and devastation on the knotty problem of Japanese knotweed - itself in-troducehere as an ornamental plant in the early 19th century before it escaped into the countryside, where it is free of natural enemies.

What then? Do these insects conveniently die off? Do they commit hari kiri en masse? Or do they just hang about, causing a nuisance for decades, if not centuries, to come? Next thing you know they'll be introducing something else to kill off the pesky psyllids.

And we all know how the story of the woman who swallowed the fly ended, don't we?