

Making Knotweed Paper

A brief photo description for making Japanese knotweed paper
by Jane Terry



Japanese knotweed is an invasive plant in Southeast Alaska.

It has been imported and planted as an ornamental plant and to stabilize steep hillsides. It can easily replace all native plants that grow in an area.

Japanese knotweed spreads underground, choking out other plants.

Preparing knotweed for paper:



Cut knotweed, saving the tender top parts. Because the leaves are not used, quite a bit of material must be gathered initially.

Knotweed is best harvested in spring when it is young and tender. Older plants can be processed, but the resulting paper pulp is harder to process.

Making Knotweed Paper



Knotweed with leaves stripped.



Cut knotweed stems in short sections - about 1" in length.



Place chopped knotweed in large enamel, stainless steel or glass cooking pot. Do not use aluminum pots.

Cover generously with water. Add washing soda to the water. For 12 cups of water use about 3 tablespoons of washing soda.



Making Knotweed Paper



Simmer material in water for several hours until the stems become soft and slimy.

Stir from time to time and take care that the heat is not too hot. Steam can build up under the plant material, creating a dome that rises in the pot and which will actually spill over onto the stove. The water becomes discolored and it can stain the stove and other surfaces it spills onto.

Cook in a well ventilated kitchen area - using a stove hood fan if possible. People often cook their material outdoors on an electric plate.



Rinse cooked knotweed very thoroughly. Use a fine mesh sieve or mesh type laundry bag for this purpose.



It is good to test for a neutral water pH (acid/alkaline level). Kits can be purchased at pet supply stores.



“Chop” a large handful of rinsed knotweed in a kitchen blender in a generous quantity of water. Blend for a minute or so until the knotweed is broken down and well suspended in the water. The knotweed should not bind up around the cutting blades. If the knotweed is too tough, it can be ground up in an old fashioned grinder prior to being placed in a blender.

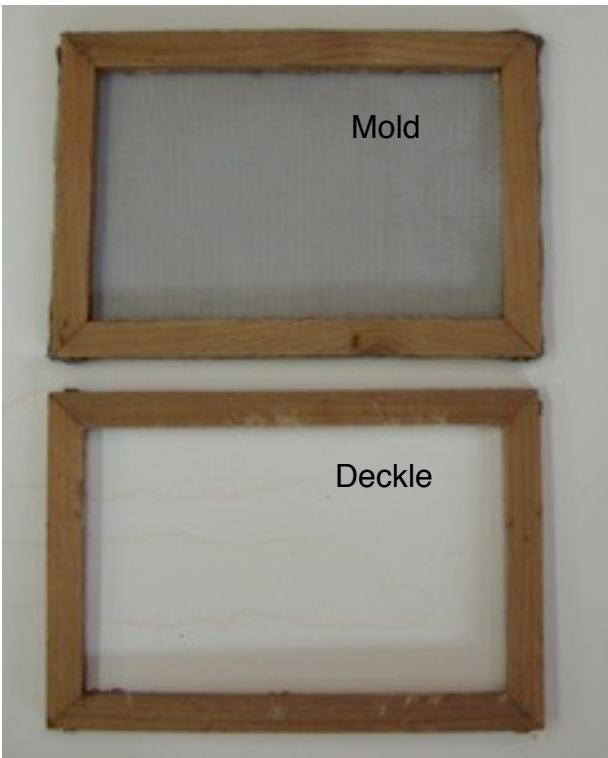


Making Knotweed Paper



Pour blended pulp in a container, such as a plastic dishpan, with about 3 or 4 more equal amounts of water and stir so the pulp is well suspended in the water.

A “formation aid”, such as okra can be added to the pulp so it will stay suspended in the water. Buy frozen okra. Place some frozen pieces in water for several hours. Squeeze it so the slimy interior part of the okra blends with the water and pour small amounts of that into the paper pulp bath.



Now a mold and deckle can be dipped into the pulp bath to form a sheet of paper.

The mold and deckle here were constructed out of 3/8” by 3/4” wood molding. Vinyl window screening was stapled onto the mold. The inside dimensions of the mold and deckle are 5 1/2” by 8 1/2”. This a good size for folded notecards.

Window screening framing material can be purchased at the hardware store to make molds and deckles quickly and easily with a hack saw and screening held in place with rubber splines that are sold with the window screening materials. Other shapes can be made with embroidery hoops, etc.



Making Knotweed Paper



Stir up the pulp in the water bath. With deckle placed firmly on the screen side of the mold, slide the two to the bottom of the pan.



Slowly pull the mold and deckle up to the surface of the water. Wait a few seconds for the pulp to settle. Pull the mold and deckle out of the water. Wait a few more seconds for the water to drain down. At this point the mold and deckle can be gently shaken forwards and backwards to bind the pulp fibers more tightly together. Turn the mold and deckle 90 degrees and gently shake a little more



Gently lift the deckle up and away from the mold.

Making Knotweed Paper



Lay the mold down (pulp side down) on a piece of fabric, such as a piece of old sheeting, that is placed on a piece of cotton toweling or wool felt.



Squeeze out water from the pulp by pressing a sponge firmly on top of the screen. Do this several times and wring out the sponge when it is full of water.



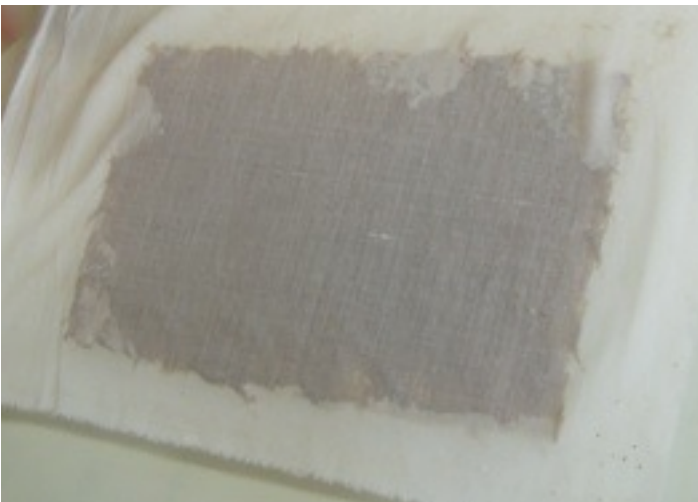
Lift the mold gently away from the newly formed piece of paper. The edges may need to be coaxed away from the mold as this process is completed.

More water can be pressed out of the paper by placing another dry sheet of fabric and toweling on top of paper and pressing with a board with a weight on top of it. Some people press several sheets of paper between sheets of fabric at this point.

Making Knotweed Paper



Lift up the "couched" piece of paper which is on the piece of fabric.



Lay the fabric down on a flat, hard and clean surface, such as glass, with the paper side down.

Gently smooth out with something like a soft paint roller.



Peel off piece of fabric and let paper dry on glass. Once dry, peel paper off glass. If it sticks a little to the glass, pry the edges up gently with a razor blade or other thin and stiff implement.

Making Knotweed Paper



The finished paper can be written on, folded, and shaped like any other piece of paper.



Other plants, such as iris, tomatoes, cedar, willow and corn can be used to make paper. All the materials in this description were purchased in grocery and hardware stores. It is a great deal of fun, especially because plants grown locally can be made into paper - **subsistence art!**

If you have questions or comments, please contact me, Jane Terry, via email at janefromthane@mac.com.