



Invasive Herbaceous Plants



Cirsium arvense, Canada Thistle



Aureosulcata Bamboo



Bissetii Bamboo



Phyllostachys Sp., Japanese Bamboo



Alliaria petiolata, Garlic Mustard



Heracleum mantegazzianum, Giant Hogweed



Phragmites australis, Common Reed



Lythrum salicaria, Purple Loosestrife



Polygonum cuspidatum, Japanese Knotweed



Sorghum halepense, Johnsongrass

Alternate Names:

Canadian thistle; Perennial thistle; Field thistle; Corn thistle

Height: 3 – 5 feet

Origin: Europe and Asia

Habitat: Dry to moist open habitats

Distribution: Northern and Southwestern U.S.; absent in South from Texas to Georgia

Ecological Threat:

Reduces biodiversity by forming dense stands and displacing native species

Reproduction: Seed, lateral roots, and root fragments

Dispersal: Seed is dispersed by wind; root fragments distributed via soil disturbance from agricultural and construction operations

Control: Herbicide

Native Alternatives:

Blackeyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*); New York Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*); Eastern Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)



Canada Thistle

Cirsium arvense (L.) Scop.

General: Canada Thistle was accidentally introduced into the United States in the 1600s, possibly from contaminated grain seed. Canada Thistle is declared a prohibited noxious weed in Maryland and must be controlled by anyone owning or managing land within the State. It is an extremely widespread weed and is designated as a noxious weed in 43 states.

Identification: Canada Thistle is an erect, perennial plant reaching three to five feet at maturity. Small purple to white flowers bloom in June and set feathery seeds in July and August. Leaves are lance-shaped, two to six inches long with irregular lobes and prickled margins.



Small purple flowers developing feathery seeds



Lance-shaped leaves with prickled margins

Reproduction: Canada Thistle produces large amounts of seed which is spread by wind. Canada Thistle reproduces vegetatively through lateral roots and root fragments.

Control Methods: Control of Canada Thistle is difficult and often requires repeated herbicide applications. Mechanical or manual removal will have minimal effect, if any. For help controlling Canada Thistle infestations, please contact the Maryland Department of Agriculture’s Plant Protection and Weed Management Section. The number to call is (410) 841-5920.

Alternate Names:

Phragmites, Giant reed,
 Giant reedgrass

Height: 6 – 12 feet

Origin: Non-native, invasive form originated from Europe. Native form is not invasive.

Habitat: Wet areas including tidal and non-tidal wetlands, fresh- and salt-water marshes, riparian areas, roadsides and ditches

Distribution: All US states but Alaska

Ecological Threat: Crowds out native plants and alters wetland hydrology

Reproduction: Primarily through rhizomes; minor reproduction through seeds

Dispersal: Rhizomes distributed via soil disturbance and construction operations; seeds dispersed by wind and water

Control: Herbicide and mowing

Native Alternatives:

Saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*); Smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*)



Common Reed

Phragmites australis (Cav.) Trin. ex Steud.

General: Common Reed (Phragmites) is an aggressive, invasive perennial grass with heights up to 10 – 13 feet. It is typically found in riparian areas, brackish and freshwater marshes, riverbanks and lakeshores. The non-native, invasive form was likely introduced from Europe during the late 1700s in ships' ballasts. The native form of phragmites is not invasive.

Identification: Phragmites is one of the largest marsh grasses and is easily identified by its height. Large fluffy flower heads, or panicles, start out purple or golden and turn gray as seeds form and mature. Leaves are approximately 12 inches long and will turn a golden yellow and drop off after the first frost. Dead stems will remain standing year round.



Purple or golden flowers in bushy panicles



Leaves approximately 12 in. long and 1/2 to 1 in. wide



Rhizomes (underground stems)

Reproduction: Phragmites seeds profusely but spreads mostly by rhizomes (underground stems) and is very successful at establishing in disturbed or polluted soils, ditches and dredged areas. Rhizomes can spread up to 30 feet per year. Marsh disturbance from road expansion and shoreline development facilitate growth and expansion of habitat.

Control Methods: Maryland State Law declares phragmites a “nuisance weed” and the Maryland Department of Transportation is required to control phragmites on its rights-of-ways. The spread of small stands can be controlled by regular mowing, but mowing will not kill the plant. A combination of mowing and multiple herbicide applications is the most effective control method. Be sure to minimize soil disturbance and quickly vegetate disturbed soils with native species.