



SOUND
NATIVE
PLANTS

Weed control – Reed canarygrass

Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) was originally introduced from Europe as a pasture grass. It has since spread far and wide to form monocultures throughout wetlands in our area. Due to vigorous growth, relatively tall habit and heavy seed production, it outcompetes many native species. Reed canarygrass also spreads vegetatively. Both forms of propagules disperse along waterways. Control will require a concerted multi-year effort, and most likely a combination of the following techniques.

Smother smaller populations. Mow the infestation to within 4” of the ground. Plant desirable, competitive vegetation and surround with landscape fabric. Leave the landscape fabric in place for at least three years. This gives the new plants a chance to get established. If the reed canarygrass exists as part of a mosaic with native vegetation this method also allows for retention of desirables. A newer method that may be successful includes overlapping sections of cardboard completely covered by a 4-6” layer of organic mulch following mowing. However, seasonal inundation of sites complicates matters, often displacing mulch. The mulch layer must be maintained at 4” thick for over one year. Allow the mulch to break down to about 3” before planting.

Isolated individuals or very small infestations can be removed by hand digging. Be thorough, even small fragments of rhizomes can sprout and form new plants. On a large scale, excavation of an infestation is used only in conjunction with establishing a different hydrologic regime. Often excavation to a depth of 16” is necessary to remove the majority of the root system.

Chemical control can be effective for short-term control but may require repeat applications for larger populations. Application times of late summer (September) or late fall (prior to the first hard frost) have both been successful. A formula of glyphosate that is certified for wetland use (Rodeo™ or Aquamaster™) plus a surfactant is the chemical most commonly used, applied at a rate of two percent. Try mowing a population (thereby preventing seed set), allow it to grow to about a foot tall and then spray. This reduces the total amount of herbicide applied and allows for good coverage of the stand. Follow-up applications will be necessary for several years to control new recruits from the existing seed bank.

Revegetation is a must following removal of any weedy species. Establishing evergreen shade over a reed canarygrass infestation might provide long-term, sustainable control, but this has not been proven. At the least, dense shade may limit recruitment and reduce growth of existing individuals. Dense, shrubby vegetation probably provides the best defense against reed canarygrass. Revegetate with spreading native shrubs, such as willows (*Salix* spp.), swamp rose (*Rosa pisocarpa*), nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*) and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*). Evergreen trees like shore pine (*Pinus contorta* v. *contorta*) and western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) may do well. If project goals rule out planting conifers and adequate soil moisture is available, competitive native emergents include hardstem bulrush (*Scirpus acutus*), small-fruited bulrush (*Scirpus microcarpus*), sawbeak sedge (*Carex stipata*), reed mannagrass (*Glyceria grandis*), and slough sedge (*Carex obnupta*). The last two species listed will tolerate some shade.



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