



# 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.