

Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia

Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*)

Description

Giant reed is one of the largest herbaceous perennial grasses, ranging between 12 and 16 feet in height. Its stems may be 1/4 to 2 inches thick. It is a warm season grass that produces rhizomes and deep fibrous roots to support its tall hollow stems. The blue-green leaves are about 1 inch wide and 12 inches long. Flowering occurs in late fall. The plume-like inflorescence reaches a length of 12 to 24 inches.

Habitat

Giant reed can grow in a wide range of conditions, from moist well-drained soils to those with a water table at or near the surface. It is found along roadsides, in ditches, and along banks of streams and rivers.

Distribution

This grass is native to countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, including Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Algeria. First introduced into the United States in the early 1800s, giant reed is grown as an ornamental throughout the southern and southwestern United States. In Virginia, it is found scattered in counties throughout the eastern portion of the state.

Threats

Giant reed can outcompete native vegetation in wetland habitats. It produces monotypic stands and thus

reduces plant diversity and wildlife habitat. Accumulation of dead giant reed plant material is a wildfire hazard.

Control

Difficult to control due to its vigorous growth, giant reed can grow from rhizome fragments scattered during disturbance of the topsoil. This limits mechanical control to mowing. Mowing must be repeated several times to ensure depletion of the rootstock. Glyphosate herbicides applied to leaves or cut stems have proven effective. Glyphosate herbicides are recommended because they are biodegradable. However, glyphosate is a nonselective systemic herbicide that affects all green vegetation. To be safe and effective herbicide use requires careful knowledge of the chemicals, appropriate concentrations, and the effective method and timing of their application. Herbicide application in conjunction with prescribed fire has also been used to control giant reed. Consult an agricultural extension agent or natural resource specialist to determine the appropriate control method for your situation.

For more information on native plant conservation, contact the Virginia Native Plant Society at the address below. For information on Virginia's natural areas and natural heritage resources contact the Virginia Department of Conservation



Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*)

and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage (see address below).

Written with assistance from Stephen E. Zurek, Virginia Polytechnic and State University.

Illustration from *Manual of the Grasses of the United States*, Vol. I, by A.S. Hitchcock, Dover Publications. Used with permission.

12/97

For more information, contact the Department of Conservation and Recreation or the Virginia Native Plant Society.



217 Governor Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219
(804) 786-7951
<http://www.state.va.us/~dcr/vaher.html>



Virginia Native Plant Society
Blandly Experimental Farm
400 Blandly Lane, Unit 2
Boyce, Virginia 22620
(540) 837-1600
<http://www.vnps.org>