

## Bamboo Eradication

Most of the ornamental bamboo species planted in the Pacific Northwest can become quite aggressive pests. Unless bamboo is planted in an area in which the invasive spreading rootstocks can be confined, it invariably spreads into areas of the garden where it's not wanted. Flower beds, shrub borders, gravel and asphalt driveways, and lawns are all possible sites of invasion.

There are a number of ways to eliminate a bamboo planting, and the methods used will be determined by the conditions in which the bamboo is growing and the outlook and abilities of the eradicator. Each method will involve patience and work.

### **Mechanical Control**

Because the roots of most bamboo grow fairly close to the surface of the soil, they are not as hard to dig out as it may seem at first. It is, however, important that as many of the underground parts as possible be grubbed out, or regrowth will occur. Each time regrowth does take place, it should be dug up immediately. This may have to be done a number of times before all parts are found and eliminated.

Another mechanical method is to cut the entire grove of bamboo to the ground. Each time the regrowth reaches 24 inches in height it must be cut again. To be successful with this method, action to remove the regrowth must be prompt so as not to allow the plant time to manufacture food reserves for the root system. This operation will need to be done many times over a period of a year or even two. Consistency will ultimately starve out the bamboo.

### **Chemical Control**

Because bamboo is really a large grass, it cannot be controlled by herbicides labeled as brush killers. However, one chemical, glyphosate, which is included in several currently available weed killers, such as Roundup® and Kleenup®, should do an adequate job of controlling unwanted bamboo.

Glyphosate is sprayed on the foliage of the bamboo, but care must be taken not to allow the spray to fall on or drift to the foliage of other plants nearby. Glyphosate cannot distinguish between “good” plants and “bad” plants and, since it is a broad-spectrum herbicide, it is likely to injure or kill any grass or broadleaf plant whose green tissues it contacts. Be careful, and follow all label instructions. Any regrowth from the root system should be sprayed again once it has reached 18 inches in height.

Bamboo invading areas where no plant growth is desired, such as driveways, parking areas, patios, or along fences, can be cut to the ground and the soil treated with any of the various soil sterilants currently available. It is very important to understand that soil treated with these chemicals will not allow any plant growth for at least a year and in some cases longer. For this reason, soil sterilants should never be used in areas in which the roots of desirable trees or shrubs are growing or might grow in the future. The high solubility and slow degradation of these chemicals may also pose a risk to both ground and surface water quality. They must always be used with great caution! **For these reasons, WSU Extension does not recommend the use of soil sterilants.**

### **False Bamboo**

False bamboo (Japanese knotweed), *Polygonum cuspidatum*, is an invasive introduced plant whose stems superficially resemble those of true bamboo. However, unlike bamboo canes that are perennial and remain alive for many years, the tops of false bamboo die off each fall. New canes are produced each spring as the plant invades more and more ground. Other features that distinguish it from true bamboo are that its leaves are very broad, and it produces many panicles of small white flowers in late summer.

Because the roots may be even more invasive and deeper than those of true bamboo, it is likely to be much more difficult to dig out. It can be done, however, but any regrowth must be dealt with promptly. Do not allow new shoots to grow to more than 20 to 24 inches high.

Chemical control can be achieved much as with true bamboo, except that there are a larger number of herbicides available. Because false bamboo is not a grass, it should respond to a wide range of weed killers labeled as brush killers.

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