

Reed Sweetgrass

Glyceria maxima

Poaceae Family

Class A Noxious Weed: Eradication Required

Identification Tips

- Perennial grass that can reach up 8.5 feet tall and grows in water or wet areas
- Unbranched stems are often reddish on lower half
- Leaves are shallowly grooved with prominent midribs
- Leaf edges have short, stiff hairs rough to the touch
- Variegated form has distinctive green and creamy white stripes on leaves; non-variegated is solid green
- Inflorescence (flower stems) is open and branched with small yellow, green or purple-tinged spikelets
- Seeds are small, smooth, dark brown
- Resembles reed canarygrass but flowering stems are open and feathery, not in compact spikes
- Also closely resembles beneficial native grasses, so get an expert to confirm before removing
- Sometimes sold as an ornamental under the names tall mannagrass or reed grass

Biology

- Spreads by seeds and vegetatively by rhizomes that produce a thick mat of stems
- Flowers June to August
- Typically goes dormant in the winter, overwintering as small, green shoots
- Rapid early spring growth

Impacts

- Can contain dangerous levels of cyanide causing poisoning in cattle that forage on it
- Displaces native wetland plants due its aggressive, dense root system; reduces seed-producing plants that feed wildlife
- Rhizomes accumulate sediment and clog small streams and drainages
- Doesn't provide nesting areas for wetland wildlife

Distribution

- Grows in wet areas, from shoreline edge to up to 6 feet of water
- Can establish along the margins of streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands



The variegated form of reed sweetgrass (above) is the most common; leaves have distinctive green and white stripes.



Only known to occur in a few isolated locations in King and Snohomish counties, this weed has the potential to spread quickly.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control
Program Line: **206-477-9333**
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

What You Can Do

Since distribution is limited to a relatively small area in King County, eradication of this noxious weed is possible. Help us by familiarizing yourself with this plant and the habitat where it grows. Contact the Noxious Weed Control Program if you see what looks to be reed sweetgrass on public lands or neighboring properties.

Control Methods

Most control methods need to be applied over a number of years to be successful.

Prevention: While it is illegal to buy or sell reed sweetgrass (*Glyceria maxima*) in Washington state, there are several similar varieties of ornamental grasses not considered noxious and even a northwest native called American mannagrass (*Glyceria grandis*) that grow in the same habitat, so identification can be difficult. Before buying and planting an unfamiliar shoreline grass, especially if you are obtaining it from an internet site, please feel free to contact us for guidance.

Manual: Small patches can be dug up, making sure to remove the entire root mass. Please bag and throw out roots and seedheads to prevent spread. Small infestations that are up from the shoreline (stems not underwater) can be controlled by tarping with heavy duty black plastic or non-woven geotextile fabric.

Mechanical: If the stems are not underwater and access is possible, mowing reed sweetgrass at least two or three times a season will reduce the vigor of the stems and decrease below ground biomass. This might be enough to allow surrounding vegetation to move in, although it is unlikely to completely eliminate the reed sweetgrass.

Chemical: Larger patches most likely will need an herbicide treatment to be effective, which will require a permit issued by the state Department of Ecology. If you suspect you have a large infestation (more than



Treating large infestations with aquatic herbicides is effective, however, a landowner must have a permit for the application. Another option is to hire a licensed contractor who would obtain the permit.



Reed sweetgrass colonizes new areas by seed or root and rhizome fragments.

several square feet), please contact us for permitting information or information on hiring a licensed aquatic weed contractor. Using an aquatic formulation of glyphosate (such as Aquamaster, Aquaneat and other products) or imazapyr (such as Habitat) will be most effective in the summer or early fall. If more than one third of the stems are flooded, effectiveness may be reduced, so it is best to spray when the water level is low. Also, plant decomposition following the treatment of a large area can reduce dissolved oxygen in the water, so it is best to remove the dead plant material after the herbicide has had a chance to work (2 to 4 weeks typically). Established populations will usually require at least 2 to 3 years of follow-up treatment.