

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Narrow-leaved cattail

Typha angustifolia



Luke Ulsamer, DCNR - BOF

Background:

It is believed that this species was introduced from Europe in the ballast of European ships. It was found occurring first in coastal locations then spreading to inland habitats.

Range:

Originally native to Europe, this species can now be found in almost every U.S. state. Similarly, it has been found in most southeast Pennsylvania counties and in most of the western half of the state.

Habitat:

Wet meadows, shores, marshes and ditches often in calcareous habitats. This species can colonize roadside areas.

Description:

Narrow-leaved cattail is typically three to five feet tall, with long, stiff leaves 1/4 to 1/2 inch in wide. Flowers form a dense cylindrical "spike" at the top of the plant and typically the male and female flowers are separated.

Biology and Spread:

Seeds are small, dry and wind dispersed. One plant can produce over 200,000 seeds per year. In addition, this species is rhizomatous, forming clones. Seeds of this species can remain viable within the soil up to 100 years. This species quickly spreads in open, wet mineral soils and can quickly out-compete native plants in aquatic, wetland habitats.

Look-a-likes:

This species looks very similar to the native common cattail (*Typha latifolia*), but the common cattail has wider leaves (1/2 to 1 inch wide) and no gap exists on the stem between male and female flowers. A hybrid between the two species (*Typha x glauca*) is also present in scattered locations. This hybrid species can be difficult to identify, as it often can exhibit characteristics of both the common and narrow-leaved cattails.

How to Control this Species:

Often if water levels can be manipulated in conjunction with cutting or mechanical removal, this species can be controlled.

Treatment with chemical control agents is possible; however extreme care must be taken in applying herbicides to wetland habitats. Fire has been used to control narrow-leaved cattail, but rhizomes must be burned or re-sprouting following fire will occur.

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