



Aquatic Nuisance Series: Cattail

Cattails (*Typha latifolia*, *T. glauca*, and *T. angustifolia*) are native wetland plants that are common around New Jersey. Cattails can have benefits for a lake's ecosystem as well as many uses for people.

In this article, we will not focus on the uses of cattail. Instead, we will concentrate on their role in a lake and look at ways to control them when they threaten to take over shorelines and shallow areas of a lake.

Description and Habitat

Cattail is usually found growing along the shorelines of New Jersey lakes. They can also be found in marshes and anywhere with slow-moving, shallow water. They are easily identified by looking at their unique flowering spike. Cattails can range in height from 3 to 10 feet. Their leaves are long and flat and resemble other native grasses.



Image courtesy of Montana Public Radio

Cattails reproduce primarily by seed and through their thick, white roots, called rhizomes. They will establish in waters up to 1 ½ feet deep. Once established, their thick root mass can spread out and over much deeper water. Under most conditions, cattail grows quickly and will crowd out other species.

Cattails can offer many benefits. Besides human uses, cattails can enhance shorelines as people find them attractive. Birds and animals will use cattail stands as hiding places as well as a food source. Cattail also acts as a good nutrient sink, especially when it pops up near the entrance of a stream into a lake, where it can act as a filter for the lake.

Management and Control

Cattail can get out of hand. In shallow parts of a lake, it can spread rapidly and dominate a large area in just a few years. Once established it can become impenetrable and block views.



Image courtesy of Weedoo Boats

Timing is the key to cattail control. Hand pulling is the most effective method and should be done before cattail is fully mature. To hand pull, grab the cattail at or as close to the root as possible. You can also cut or mow cattail in late summer, when the plant has not sent its energy into the roots for winter storage. Be sure to cut just under or just above the water surface. Cutting after the growing season will have limited success.

If you are able to drop the level of your lake, cattail pulling should be timed with the year the lake level goes down. Freezing of the roots may further inhibit the regrowth of the cattail the following season.

Chemical controls are also available, but should only be used as a last resort. Cattail can be tough to chemically reduce, so you may require a large load in the lake. Please consult your lake management professional about chemical options.

Additional Resources

<http://essex.cce.cornell.edu/natural-resources/water-conservation-quality/ponds/controlling-cattails>

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=tyla