

Bamboo Management In the Landscape

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Bamboo is a group of perennial grasses that are often used as ornamental accents in gardens. There are many species of bamboo that range in size and invasive potential. Many invasive species belong to the group of “running” bamboos that spread aggressively via a network of roots and rhizomes (Figure 1). “Clumping” species tend to be less aggressive invaders and spread slowly. The rhizome network is used to store energy for the plant; therefore all the rhizomes must be exhausted to eliminate bamboo from the landscape.

Certain bamboo species have tremendous growth rates, leading to their designation as the fastest-growing plant on earth – growing as fast as 4 feet in a 24-hour period. This incredible growth rate is attractive when establishing a hedge or screen; however, the invasiveness of some species can be troublesome once the screen is established. Maintenance programs should be designed to routinely mow or cut shoots that emerge outside of the desired location of the bamboo planting.

Once established, it is very labor-intensive to remove bamboo from an area. The most successful strategy is to mechanically remove all the stems and roots. Root system removal is often difficult and might require the use of heavy machinery. An alternative is to remove the stems of the plants to ground level and then begin an intense mowing program that will remove stems and foliage that re-sprout. Mowing must occur frequently and will take months or years to exhaust the extensive rhizome network’s resources. Herbicides are sometimes recommended, but are often unsuccessful at eradicating bamboo by themselves.

Figure 1: Bamboo screen invading a landscape



The combination of appropriate herbicides and the mowing program above may improve eradication efficacy. Focus should be placed on designing physical root barriers when planting invasive bamboo varieties in the landscape (Figure 2). These barriers can help minimize or even eliminate the spread of the roots and rhizomes out of the confined area.

Figure 2: Root barrier surrounding bamboo



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