

RUNNING BAMBOO INFORMATION SHEET

Because of its ability to grow fast, spread quickly, and create tall, thick evergreen formations, many property owners plant bamboo as a privacy hedge for screening purposes. Once planted and established, however, running bamboo can aggressively take over yards, traveling and spreading as much as 15-feet horizontally per year as the rhizomes grow underground like tentacles and push up new cane stalks. Running bamboo can be destructive to the natural environment and suppress native plant species where it is permitted to grow, creating issues for adjacent property owners and local jurisdictions. Because of these effects, planting or neglecting to remove running bamboo threatens the value and physical integrity of both public and private property in Fairfax County.



Definition – Bamboo is a fast-growing, perennial grass with hollow stems and stalked blades, that propagates as new shoots from buds of underground stems that spread and produce new canes. There are two main types of bamboo:

Clumping bamboo (sympodial or pachymorph) is noninvasive, with short roots that spread slowly in small clumps.

Running bamboo (monopodial or leptomorph) is invasive, and spreads quickly through the growth of long, horizontal stems, called **rhizomes**.



In 2018 the Virginia legislature voted to designate running bamboo as a noxious weed, giving localities the option and authority to control it through the adoption of a local ordinance. In lieu of adopting a local bamboo ordinance, Fairfax County has decided to provide outreach and education to residents concerning the hazards of bamboo, and the responsibilities of residents who choose to plant or maintain it on their property.

Property Owner Responsibilities and Suggestions

Although not prohibited from being planted, it is good practice for property owners who choose to plant or maintain running bamboo to take reasonable and responsible steps to control its spread. Bamboo that grows beyond a person's property boundaries, either onto adjacent private property or onto a public right-of-way, is a nuisance that has negative environmental impacts.

Maintenance and Containment

1. Maintain a minimum 10' distance between the edge of the bamboo and any adjacent property line or public right-of-way line

2. Install or implement an appropriate underground containment measure, effective at preventing running bamboo from spreading within ten feet of any adjoining property not owned by the landowner, or any public right of way or public roadway

- Metal and heavy plastic containment measures are effective
- A barrier depth of 2-3' is effective, with the barrier projecting 1-2" above ground level and slanted outward at the top so any rhizomes hitting the barrier will bend upwards to the surface
- Regularly check the barrier and cut off any rhizomes that reach the surface
- A barrier does not stop running bamboo from spreading, it only deflects it



Underground Containment Barriers

Removal

1. The growth and removal of bamboo can have detrimental effects on adjacent trees and vegetation. Quick and early removal can reduce the long-term impacts to those trees and vegetation
2. Continued removal of new plants and sprouts will be necessary to limit plant propagation. Ongoing regular cutting and mowing will eventually kill most plants by exhausting their food reserves
3. Various herbicides are available to kill bamboo but their use should include strict accordance to label directions. Treated areas should be monitored regularly for any new seedlings or regrowth
4. Digging plants out is costly and may require heavy equipment, may be time consuming, and may not be a permanent solution
5. Clearing of land to remove bamboo may be subject to County review and approval. Clearing in an RPA or clearing any area greater than 2,500 SF requires approval from Land Development Services (LDS). Please contact LDS at 703-324-1575 or in person at the Customer Information Center on the first floor of the Herrity Building, 12055 Government Center Pkwy Fairfax County, VA 22035, for further information.



Before Removal



During Removal



After Removal



Fairfax County Department of Code Compliance
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 1016, Fairfax, VA 22035
Phone: 703-324-1300, TTY 711
Web: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/code



To request this information in an alternate format, contact the Department of Code Compliance.