

# Cattails (*Typha* spp.)

## DESCRIPTION:

Narrow-leaved cattail (*Typha angustifolia*) is an introduced cattail species native to Eurasia. Hybrid cattail (*Typha x glauca*) is an aggressive hybrid of narrow-leaved cattail and the native broad-leaved cattail (*T. latifolia*). In a healthy wetland environment, broadleaf cattail is a desirable species with great value for wildlife and humans as food, shelter and building material. However, today, most of our wetlands are highly polluted with silt, nutrients and pesticides due to poor agricultural and development practices and our society's complete lack of regard for clean water. These high levels of nutrients in the water stimulate cattail growth while inhibiting other wetland plants. As a result, even the native broadleaf cattail can become adventive and spread aggressively forming large monocultures. Both narrow-leaved and hybrid cattail are invasive, even in relatively healthy wetlands, and can be extremely aggressive in more typical polluted conditions, effectively driving out all other plant life.

**-2**  
Persistent  
Weed

**-5**  
Highly  
Invasive

## IDENTIFICATION:

Cattails in general are one of our most identifiable wild plants. Differentiating among the different species and hybrid is considerably more difficult due to variability among individuals and the spectrum of characteristics among species. The native broad-leaved cattails have leaves around 1" wide and seed heads that are greater than 1" in width. When blooming in early-summer, the upper male and lower female structures present as a single long column, with no gap between them. Later in the season, the stalk above and below the seed head are roughly the same diameter.

Leaves of narrow-leaved cattail are < 1/2" wide with seed heads < 1" wide. When flowering, there is distinctive gap (.3" to 1.5" long) between the male and female flower columns. Later in the season you can see that the stalk above the remaining seed head is narrower than the stalk below the seed head. Hybrid individuals are intermediate between the two species.

## CONTROL METHODS:

It is important to consider that cattails are as much a symptom of a polluted wetland as they are an ecological issue in their own right. Cattail control may not be practical unless the underlying water pollution issues can also be alleviated.

**Organic:** Cattails can be "drowned" by mowing at least 4" below water level. This is particularly effective after they have bolted, and are in the flowering stage, in early summer. Use brushcutters with a metal cutting blade. Dry and re-grease the cutting-heads after each day of use. In wetlands where the water level is controlled artificially, it should be lowered for cutting (potentially also allowing the use of larger mowers adapted for use in wetlands) and raised afterwards to make it more difficult for the resprouts to get above water level. This method may need to be repeated several times in a growing season for effective control.

**Chemical:** Aquatic-approved, glyphosate-based herbicides (Rodeo®, etc.) work well. for small populations they can be applied via the glove-of-death or cut-stump methods. If no desirable plants species are present, foliar spray application can be used with efforts made to minimize the amount of herbicide reaching the water. Herbicide can also be applied using a whicking method via hand-held devices or a whicking apparatus attached to the front of an off-road vehicle appropriate for use in a wetland. Prescribed fire is often used both prior to and following herbicide application to remove standing dead vegetation.

