



# Invasive Plant Alert <sup>1</sup>

## Giant reed

*Arundo donax* L.

Giant reed is established and highly invasive in the southern and western U.S. where it forms extensive and dense colonies. It alters fire regimes, hydrology and nutrient cycling. It has the potential for becoming a threat in the mid-Atlantic.



Figure 1 Giant reed, height. Chuck Bargeron, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

### Where to Look

Giant reed prefers moist, well-drained soils typically found along waterways. However, because it is tolerant to drought and saline soils, it can grow in deserts, fields and urban areas.

Giant reed is native to the tropical and temperate regions from Northern Africa to Southeastern Asia. It was introduced to Europe and the Americas for erosion control and

as an ornamental. It was introduced to California in the early 1800s and spread through the lower half of the continental US. It has been reported to be invasive across the southern U.S. from California to Maryland.



Figure 2 Giant reed, flowers. David J. Moorhead, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

### Identifying the Plant

Giant reed is a perennial grass, growing up to 10 m tall. It grows in clumps, held together by a dense mat of fleshy rhizomes and tap roots. The hollow stems are 0.5-5 cm wide and resemble bamboo. The leaves are blue-green, but young leaf in particular can vary in color. The 1-5 cm wide leaves are smooth, stiff and grow up to 1 m long. Giant reed flowers in August and September. The flowers are 30-60 cm cream to purplish, plume-like panicles.

Giant reed can be confused with common reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*) which is shorter and has silvery-tan flowers. It can also be confused with tall bamboos like golden

bamboo (*Phyllostachys aureus*) which have woody stems and

### How to get rid of it?

Giant reed is spread by rhizome fragments and new plants can regrow from small fragments.

Cutting stems will effectively remove above ground biomass. To be effective, roots and stems should be dug up and removed. Repeated mowing may exhaust plant resources. Grazing by animals (e.g., cattle, sheep and goats) has had partial success.

Several species are being investigated as potential biological control agents. In 2009 a wasp (*Tetramesa romana*) was released.

Chemicals may be applied directly to freshly cut stems or on the leaves. Glyphosate, imazapyr or a combination may be effective. Application is most effective after flowering and prior to dormancy. Follow the label restrictions. Repeat application will be necessary.

### Resources

Weed Risk Assessment for *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae) – Giant reed. 2012. USDA.

Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*): Biology, Identification, and Management. University of Florida. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ag307>; accessed July 2012.

<sup>1</sup> This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region