

INVASIVE OF THE MONTH

Rough horsetail: A native so aggressive that it's invasive

From Brodhead Watershed Association



Spread by spores and underground runners, rough horsetail is extremely difficult to eradicate.

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You may think it's a kind of bamboo at first. Like bamboo, rough horsetail is hollow and segmented. But unlike bamboo, which is in the grass family, rough horsetail is part of an ancient group of plants that reproduces by spores, rather than seeds.

It's native to many parts of the world, including Pennsylvania. A medium- to dark-green, water-loving plant that grows up to 3 feet tall, gardeners like it as a potted plant for modern or Asian-themed gardens and in water features.

But it's extremely aggressive and easily escapes the boundaries of pots. Its underground runners spread long distances, under pavements and garden walls, and its spores spread the plant far and wide. In wetlands and along creeks, it can quickly become the dominant plant. You can see it Minisink Park in Smithfield Township, for instance, where it has become a pervasive pest.

In large enough quantities, or when dried and mixed with fodder, rough horsetail can poison horses and other livestock.

ERADICATING ROUGH HORSETAIL

Getting rid of it can be next to impossible. Not buying it in the first place is the best strategy. If you have an infestation, remove fertile stems as soon as they appear, to reduce spread by spores. Pull or cut new growth as soon as possible. Herbicide works best when plants are 6 inches tall or less.

Detailed information is at www.maine.gov/dacf/php/gotpests/weeds/factsheets/horsetail-wash.pdf and at www.brodheadwatershed.org