



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226  
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## LESSER CATTAIL

*Typha angustifolia*

**THREAT:** Lesser, or narrow-leaf, cattail is a native to Europe and, possibly the eastern United States (or was introduced very early in European settlement of North America). It grows in marshes, wet meadows, ditches, lakesides and other wetland areas, in both fresh and brackish water. Lesser cattail is tolerant of saline soils and can grow in water up to 3 feet deep. Once established, it will tolerate fluctuating water levels, as well as periods of flooding and drought. Lesser cattail produces large quantities of wind-dispersed seed and spreads vegetatively through rhizomes. Hybrids can be formed between this species and common cattail (*Typha latifolia*). In areas where lesser cattail is not native, it can displace native wetland plants and form dense stands which exclude other plants. Lesser Cattail occurs in many locations throughout North America, and has been found in some sites in Washington State. This plant is currently on the state noxious weed board's monitor list.

**DESCRIPTION:** Lesser cattail is a perennial, closely related to our native common cattail. This plant grows up to 6 feet tall, bearing deep green leaves 2 to 6 feet long, and ¼ to ½ inch wide. It spreads both by rhizomes and seeds. Flowers, which appear in mid-summer, grow on erect stalks, producing fruit that contain downy seed. Lesser cattail is quite similar to common cattail. Generally, lesser cattail is a less robust plant, with narrower leaves and flowerheads, than common cattail. There is usually a separation on the stalk between male and female flowers in lesser cattail, while there is no gap present in common cattail.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Lesser cattail can be controlled using cultural, mechanical and chemical control. Draining or deeply flooding the site for an extended period of time can control cattail, but this will also kill many other wetland plants. Cutting the plants, followed by flooding, has also been successful in controlling lesser cattail. To be effective, control work must be continued, as needed, throughout several growing seasons. Contact the weed control board for chemical recommendations.



Photograph courtesy of J.M DiTomaso