



BAMBOO
WORLD

NON-INVASIVE BAMBOO

RUNNING BAMBOO CONTROL OR DISPOSAL IN AN URBAN OR SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT.

This fact sheet has been formulated to address the common inquiry of how to control or eradicate running bamboo if it is evident in your yard.

This problem is a common one, but it does depend to some degree on your environment in that running bamboos generate much more slowly in very, very cold climates. In the average Australian climate, particularly where they get rainfall between midwinter and midsummer (from mid NSW downwards, but even to a lesser degree up into Queensland) runners can be very destructive and invasive (there are wild hectares taking over forests near here) even though they grow more slowly than clumpers. Whilst runners' invasive underground rhizomes are slower to produce 'above ground' growth than the non-invasive clumping bamboos, generally the underground rhizome canes of runners are about two years beyond and ahead of the culms and leaf projecting from the ground.

It is not effective in the longer term to just mow off or break the shoots off, because the plant will keep on producing underground rhizomes in your yard until it chokes the ground in the area where you are not letting it develop culms. This depletes the ability of the ground to grow other plant life. The problem with runners is the destructive nature of those strong rhizomes on both the garden and the various stone walls, or on paving areas you may have established, and sometimes even concrete. Roots of clumpers are not a problem.

Running bamboos cannot reproduce (or be propagated) from the plant portion above ground (the culm, branches or leaf), which is quite different to clumping bamboos. Nor can runners (or clumpers) reproduce from the roots, which are very fine (much like spaghetti size or smaller). What *you* call 'roots' are actually rhizomes, which on runners are underground canes which the plant must produce every year in order to have new shoots and culms (which individual running rhizomes normally don't do until two years old). As those annually produced rhizomes or underground canes are the only part of the plant capable of reproducing, to kill the plant you must kill or remove the rhizomes (don't worry about either the roots or the culms). The problem is that it is neither practical nor reasonable for you to have to dig your yard up every year in order to control your neighbour's invasive plant, and in effect that's what you will have to do.

The processes available to you are as follows:

1. First you must either persuade your neighbour to join you in killing the whole plant (which is certainly not easy), or you will be faced with a more difficult isolation problem because the bamboo will want to invade every year. If your neighbour loves bamboo, tell him/her there are hundreds of very beautiful non-invasive bamboos that he/she can plant after getting rid of the runner. Clumpers are very fast growing compared to runners (four years to full size), and are easy to control, most species remaining in a tight clump where they were planted.
2. We have cut off and poisoned runners 12 years ago (with 50% Roundup and water) by cutting all the culms off near ground level and pouring the mixture into the top of the cut off canes. It appears to be very effective except that we had to use more poison for two years running. Also, about every four years after that the bamboo seems to appear again in small patches, and we have to poison it again. We use the cut off cane method in the initial poisoning to prevent having to spray large areas with poison, and subsequent applications are by spot spraying the small culm leaves that appear after allowing the leaf to develop to the point where they are obvious.
3. The most effective method of all is to dig all of the rhizomes up, which in your case I suspect means digging your whole yard up. You cannot leave a single piece of rhizome or the plant will continue to develop underground. We have used a backhoe for this method quite successfully. Most of the runner found in yards have rhizomes no more than 200mm or 8" deep, but it is very hard work to do it all by hand. Once you have most of the central ones out, you can follow individual rhizomes to their end.
4. If you use this method to solve your problem, you are going to have to do it again along your fence line each year to prevent your neighbour's bamboos continuing to invade. The alternative to that is to dig a trench 18" deep (depending on the species, because it may need to be deeper for some of the larger runners) and bury some form of non-corroding impenetrable barrier such as an old piece of conveyor belt, to prevent the rhizomes from entering your yard (galvanised iron is no good because it rusts, and the rhizomes also wriggle through the join gaps).

If you get desperate and your neighbour is extremely uncooperative, your council or local authority may help you avoid having to go to court by joining you in trying to persuade your neighbour to remove the plant. If you do approach the council, please give them a copy of our book, "Bamboo Rediscovered" or "Bamboo World", and this letter, and tell them that the problem is not because the plant is bamboo, but because the species chosen is specifically an invasive species that should not be planted in that environment. We have had some problems uneducated councils wanting to ban all bamboo without understanding the difference between a running bamboo and a clumping bamboo.