

## *What is the best way of controlling it?*

### **Mechanical control:**

Johnsongrass does not like to be mowed at a low height. With mowing, you have to be careful on spreading the seeds, which could make the problem worse. Mowing must be done consistently for it to have an effect; bush hogging 4 times a year will have little or no effect.

The best time to control Johnsongrass is before it goes to seed.

**Chemical control:** Johnsongrass is easily killed by glyphosate, an active ingredient found in products such as Roundup. It should be sprayed in the first half of June, before it produces seeds. (Please keep in mind that some products with glyphosate, like Roundup, are non-selective. Non-selective pesticides can kill all of the plants that the chemical touches. Please be careful when using these products, and follow the directions on the label.)



*A clump of Johnsongrass. Image taken by Jim Gehlsen in Nokesville, VA*

## *Resources and contacts*

- Prince William Soil & Water Conservation District:  
(571) 379-7514  
www.pwsacd.org  
pwsacd@pwsacd.org
- Virginia Cooperative Extension (PWC) Horticulture Help Desk (Paige Thacker):  
(703) 792-7747
- www.pwcgov.org/grow
- Weeds of the Northeast by Richard H. Uva, Joseph C. Neal, and Joseph M. DiTomaso
- Virginia Tech Weed Identification Guide:  
<http://www.ppws.vt.edu/weedin dex.htm>



Virginia  
Cooperative Extension  
A partnership of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University www.ext.vt.edu



## *Johnsongrass: A Farmer's Nemesis*



*A field of mature Johnsongrass. Image taken by Jim Gehlsen in Nokesville, VA*

Johnsongrass is an invasive and aggressive plant, typically found in hay and crop fields.

Under certain environmental conditions, it is toxic to cattle.

It can affect the productivity of farmland and choke out desirable crops.

## Common questions:

### History

Johnsongrass is an invasive grass native to the Mediterranean as a forage grass because of its aggressive growth and tolerance to heat and drought. It is also called rhizome Johnsongrass because it has rhizomes along its root system. If the root system is disturbed by cultivation, each rhizome will grow another plant. This is one reason the plant is hard to control.

### What does it look like?

- Typically produces purplish seed heads between July– September
- Can grow as tall as 8-12' tall
- Leaves are flat and skinny with a prominent midvein; typically smooth and hairless (can have some hairs)
- Aggressive root system with rhizomes



Johnsongrass roots and rhizomes

Image from: <http://www.forestryimages.org>



Johnsongrass seed head

Image from <http://www.pbase.com>

### How did I get it?

Johnsongrass is mostly spread by seed and rhizomes. It is easily identified by the large seed cone at the top in July–September. The seed is spread by wind, birds & animals. Machines working infested fields can also transport seeds to the next field. Be sure that any machinery entering a field is clean. If cows are fed contaminated silage, the seed will pass through with the manure and germinate when it reaches the soil.

### When /How does it grow?

Johnsongrass emerges from established roots the first week of June in our area. It is very coarse and usually grows faster than other grasses. In an open field it will grow about 4' tall and go to seed. In a corn field it can easily grow over 10' tall.

It tends to outgrow native plants. The stalks will die from the first frost in October and the roots will be dormant through the winter. The roots will sprout again the following year and the seed will germinate wherever they make contact with soil in the hot months.

## Toxicity

- Under certain conditions, such as drought, frost, secondary growth, and trampling, Johnsongrass will produce cyanide, a toxin that is particularly harmful to cattle.
- Signs of cyanide poisoning typically occur within 15-30 minutes of consumption; signs to look for are difficulty in breathing, staggering, anxiousness, convulsions, and death.
- Consult your vet immediately if you notice these symptoms with your livestock.
- Properly drying Johnsongrass for hay will contain little to no cyanide.



Mature Johnsongrass

Image from <http://mdc.mo.gov/landwater-care/invasive-species-management/invasive-plant-management/johnson-grass-control>