

## Pond Facts #23 Coontail

### Description

Coontail is a very common aquatic plant in Pennsylvania ponds and lakes. It has whorls of stiff leaves that get more compact toward the end of the stem. The leaves are forked at each end. Coontail lacks true roots, so it may be very loosely anchored to the bottom or float freely. It can grow in deep water (>6 feet) and often stays green and continues to grow throughout the winter.

### Value and Concern to the Pond

Coontail has tremendous value to the pond or lake because it provides food and habitat throughout the year. The dense stems are great habitat for insects and provide a source of food for fish and other wildlife. Waterfowl will feed directly on the plant. Coontail can grow to nuisance levels in ponds and lakes with excessive amounts of nutrients.

### Prevention

Overabundant growth is a symptom of excessive nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) in the pond water. These nutrients may come from barnyards, crop fields, septic systems, lawns, and golf courses. Control of coontail is best accomplished by reducing fertilizer applications near the pond, maintaining nearby septic systems, redirecting nutrient-rich runoff away from the pond, and maintaining vegetative buffer strips around the pond.

### Physical Control

Coontail does not respond well to cutting, raking, or harvesting because it can reproduce from small plant fragments left behind.

### Biological Controls

Grass carp can be used to control coontail. Grass carp must be purchased from an approved hatchery after receiving a state permit. Consult the grass carp fact sheet available from your local PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) office or at [water.cas.psu.edu/ponds.htm](http://water.cas.psu.edu/ponds.htm).

### Chemical Controls

Numerous aquatic herbicides can be used to control coontail, including Aquathol-K, Aqua-Kleen, Komeen, Navigate, Reward, Weedtrine-D, and Sonar. Make sure that you positively identify the plant in your pond as coontail before proceeding. Carefully measure the pond area and volume to determine the amount of herbicide needed. You must obtain a permit, which is jointly reviewed by the PFBC and the PA DEP, before applying a herbicide to your pond or lake. The permit application can be obtained from a local



PFBC or DEP office, extension office or online at [water.cas.psu.edu/ponds.htm](http://water.cas.psu.edu/ponds.htm). Aquatic herbicides can be purchased from home- and farm-supply stores, hardware stores, or various online suppliers. *Follow the herbicide label carefully.* Herbicide treatments should be done early in the growing season before the plant cover a large portion of the pond. Treatment of severe infestations may cause a fish kill due to reduced dissolved oxygen.

### Additional Resources

For further information and publications on pond management visit [water.cas.psu.edu/ponds.htm](http://water.cas.psu.edu/ponds.htm) or contact your local cooperative extension office.

Prepared by Bryan R. Swistock, senior extension associate and Heather Smiles, fisheries biologist, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research, extension, and resident education programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### This publication is available in alternative media on request.

The Pennsylvania State University is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. It is the policy of the University to maintain an academic and work environment free of discrimination, including harassment. The Pennsylvania State University prohibits discrimination and harassment against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. Discrimination or harassment against faculty, staff, or students will not be tolerated at The Pennsylvania State University. Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to the Affirmative Action Director, The Pennsylvania State University, 328 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802-2801, Tel 814-865-4700/V, 814-863-1150/TTY.