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# Horsetail

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=257>

Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), often called mare's tail, is an invasive, deep-rooted perennial weed that will spread quickly to form a dense carpet of foliage, crowding out less vigorous plants in beds and borders.



## Quick facts

**Common name** Horsetail, mare's tail (misapplied)

**Botanical name** *Equisetum arvense*

**Areas affected** Beds, borders, lawns, paths and patios

**Main causes** May establish from spores, but usually arrives via rhizomes from neighbouring gardens, or stem fragments in composts or manures

**Timing** Seen in spring and summer; treat in late summer.

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## What is horsetail?

Horsetail is an invasive, deep-rooted weed with fast-growing rhizomes (underground stems) that quickly send up dense stands of foliage.

## Appearance

Horsetail is easily recognised by its upright, fir tree-like shoots that appear in summer.

In spring, fertile light brown stems, 20-50cm (10-20in) tall, appear with a cone-like spore producing structure at the end of the stems.

In summer, sterile green shoots develop into fir tree-like plants, 60cm (2ft) tall.

## The problem

The creeping rhizomes of this pernicious plant may go down as deep as 2m (7ft) below the surface, making them hard to remove by digging out, especially if they invade a border. They often enter gardens by spreading underground from neighbouring properties or land.

## Control

### Non-chemical controls

Removing horsetail by hand is difficult. Although rhizomes growing near the surface can be forked out, deeper roots will require a lot of excavation. Shallow, occasional weeding is not effective and can make the problem worse, as the plant can regrow from any small pieces left behind. However, removing shoots as soon as they appear above the ground can reduce infestation if carried out over a number of years.

If horsetail appears in lawns, it can be kept in check by mowing regularly.

### Chemical controls

Infestations of horsetail can be weakened with weedkiller.

- On vacant soil, where there are no herbaceous perennials, bulbs or crops, you can use Bayer Ground Clear Weedkiller containing glyphosate\*/flufenacet/metosulam to inhibit new shoots
- Tough weedkillers containing glyphosate\* (e.g. Scotts Roundup Tree Stump & Rootkiller, Scotts Tumbleweed, Bayer Tough Rootkill, Bayer Garden Super Strength Weedkiller, Doff Maxi Strength Glyphosate Weedkiller or Westland Resolva Xtra Tough Concentrate or for spot treatment use Scotts Roundup Gel) can be applied in late summer when growth is strong. Before using, bruise the shoots with a rake to ensure effective penetration

**Remember:** horsetail is persistent, and several applications – possibly over a number of years – may be necessary to completely eradicate the problem.

**\*A note on glyphosate May 2016:** After reviewing glyphosate, the European Parliament has given the go ahead to relicence it but proposes disallowing certain uses such as public open space and restricting it to professional use only. The final resolution will be decided by national authorities this summer which may mean the withdrawal of glyphosate-based weedkillers for home gardeners in the UK. Check the RHS website for further updates.

## SO STOCK UP ON ROUND UP !