

Common Reed

Phragmites australis

Ecological Impact

- Common reed has become a destructive weed, quickly displacing desirable plant species. Its high biomass blocks light to other plants and occupies all the growing space below ground so plant communities can turn into a *Phragmites* monoculture very quickly.
- Invasive stands of common reed eliminate diverse wetland plant communities and provide little food or shelter for wildlife.

Characteristics

Common reed is a tall perennial wetland grass ranging in height from 3 to 20 feet. Strong leathery horizontal shoots called rhizomes growing on or beneath the soil surface give rise to roots and tough vertical stalks. Cane-like stems, 1 inch in diameter, support broad sheath-type leaves that are .5 to 2 inches wide near the base tapering to points at the ends. Plants produce large, dense, feathery, grayish purple plumes 5 to 16 inches long in late June through September. The reeds turn tan in the fall and most leaves drop off, leaving only the plume-topped shoot. The root system is comprised of rhizomes that can reach to 6 feet deep with roots emerging at the nodes. Common reed reproduces by spreading rhizomes that form large colonies.



Phragmites like a grassy forest.



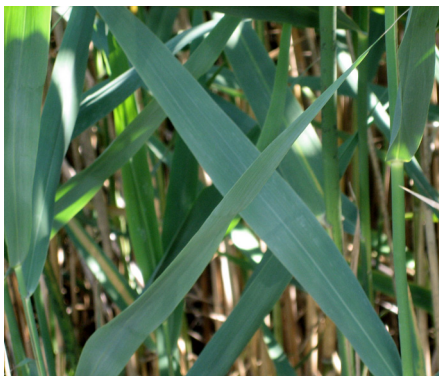
Common reed in North Barrington.

Habitat

Common reed thrives in sunny wetland habitats. It grows along drier borders and elevated areas of brackish and freshwater marshes and along riverbanks and lakeshores. The species is particularly prevalent in disturbed or polluted soils with alkaline and brackish waters but will tolerate highly acidic conditions. It can grow in water up to 6 feet deep and also in somewhat dry sites. It can be found along roadsides, ditches, open wetlands, riverbanks, lake shores, dredged areas, and disturbed or undisturbed plant communities.



Common reed seed heads.



Common reed stems and leaves.



Common reed with car for height comparison.

Similar Species

In this area, there is no other plant likely to be confused with *Phragmites* although similar plants do appear in other parts of the country. It has a very distinctive appearance, and seeing this tall, plumed plant in wet ditches or marshy places leaves little doubt as to its identity.

Control Methods for Common Reed

Property owners wishing to deal with stands of *Phragmites australis* should contact a company that is licensed to perform this type of service.

If you have a very small amount of common reed, the following methods will help prevent it from spreading.

Manual

You can dig up very small populations if you are careful to remove all root material and surrounding soil. You can cut common reed and dig the rhizomes, but physical control is difficult because the plant can reestablish from seed or remaining rhizomes.

Frequent mowing is sometimes an effective control of common reed.

Chemical

Common reed can be effectively controlled using a general use herbicide such as glyphosate. Follow label and state requirements.

If your common reed is growing in a wet area, the herbicide must be one approved for use in areas of standing water. This is a job for a professional. The appropriate chemical treatment will be a challenge and may require a permit.

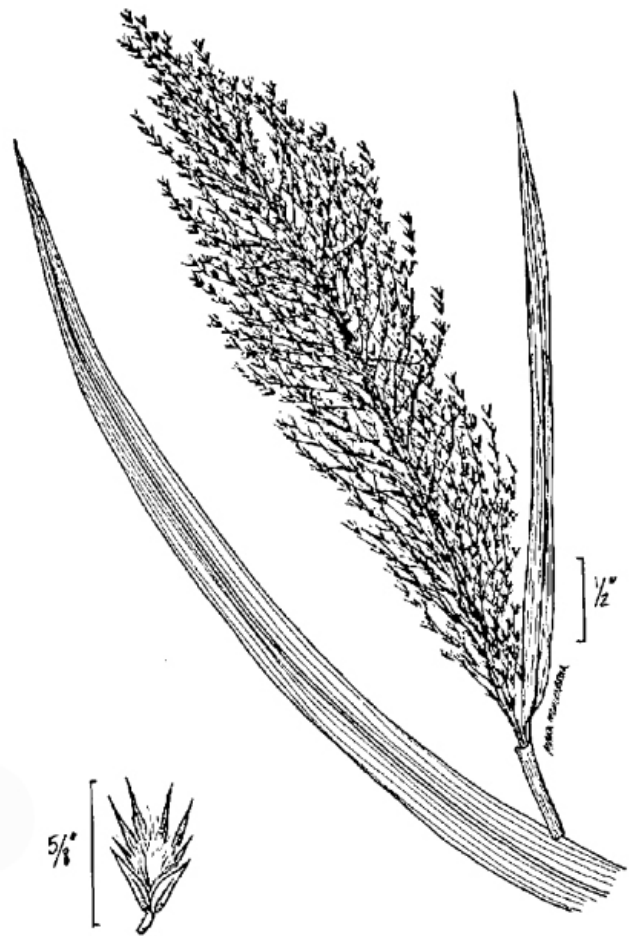
Suggested Replacements

Immediately upon removing a stand of common reed from dry sites, install replacement plants or cover the bare soil with several sheets of newspaper and wood chips. Leaving bare soil encourages other weeds to invade.

Most native grasses that grow happily in the habitat from which you are removing common reed will thrive in its place.



Invasive triple-threat: common reed, cattails and reed canary grass.



Phragmites australis. USDA PLANTS Database, USDA NRCS PLANTS Database, Bugwood.org

Sources

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/common-reed.pdf#xml=http://www.na.fs.fed.us/cgi-bin/texis.exe/Webinator/search/xml.txt?query=phragmites&pr=default&prox=page&rorder=500&rprox=500&rdfreq=500&rwfreq=500&rlead=500&sufs=0&order=r&cq=&id=4a31c50533

Photos by CFC Community Education committee.



CITIZENS FOR CONSERVATION
459 West Highway 22
Barrington IL 60010

847-382-SAVE (7383)

www.citizensforconservation.org

100% RECYCLED PAPER August 2011