

Common Reed

(*Phragmites australis*)



Key ID Features

Arrangement: alternate

Leaves: broad, flat, pointed leaves, blue-green color; sheathing stipule stays close to stem

Flowers: dense and fluffy; purple color in July, tan later in the season

Fruit: seeds are light brown

Stem: thick vertical stalks, dull green; dead stalks persist

Root: rhizomes

Growth Habit: tall herbaceous perennial grass, grows up to 15 ft.



The Impact

Common Reed (also called “Phragmites”) originally came to the United States in the ballast of ships. Since its introduction in the 1800s it has become an aggressive invader of wetlands that outcompetes native plants. It spreads via horizontal stems (rhizomes and stolons) and releases chemicals into the soil that inhibit the growth of other plants (allelopathy).

Common Reed also provides poor quality habitat for wildlife. Fish populations that reproduce in wetlands where Common Reed is present suffer higher egg and juvenile mortality.

Quick Facts

Plant Family: Poaceae

Origin: Eurasia

Habitat: wetlands, disturbed areas, meadows and fields, commonly found along roadsides

Present in Vermont?: yes

Method of Spread: primarily by stolons and rhizomes

Status: Class B Noxious Weed*
<http://bit.ly/VTPlantQuarantine>

**The Vermont Noxious Weed Quarantine listing means it is illegal to buy, sell, or transport this species in Vermont*

Native Plant Alternatives



Big Bluestem
(*Andropogon gerardii*): attracts butterflies, nesting site for birds, grows in a variety of soils, useful in erosion control



Softstem Bulrush
(*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*): nesting site for birds, food for muskrats, useful in erosion control



Common Look-alike



Distinguishing Features:

Color: yellow-green leaves, base of stem reddish under sheathing stipule

Stipule: sheathing stipule falls away from the plant

Growth: grows interspersed with native plants

Fungus: black dots occur on stem and stipule due to fungus

Control Information

To learn more about identification & control options, check out the Gallery of Land Invasives on ***VTinvasives.org*** and these additional resources:

http://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Phragmites_BMP_FINAL.pdf

References: Ohio State University Weed Guide - Common Reed, Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program - Common Reed, Noxious Weeds in King County, Washington - Common Reed, Great Lakes Phragmites Native v. Invasive, Swearingen, J. and K. Saltonstall. 2010. Phragmites Field Guide

This publication was created in 2019 by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Transportation and other VTInvasives.org partners.

