



## Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

### Catalog of Species Search Results



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## *Phalaris arundinacea*

(Reed canary-grass  
ribbon grass )

[Common Name\(s\)](#) | [Full Scientific Name](#) | [Family Name Common](#) | [Family Scientific Name](#) | [Images](#) | [Synonyms](#) | [Description](#) | [Similar Species](#) | [Reproductive/Dispersal Mechanisms](#) | [Distribution](#) | [History of Introduction in New England](#) | [Habitats in New England](#) | [Threats](#) | [Early Warning Notes](#) | [Management Links](#) | [Documentation Needs](#) | [Additional Information](#) | [References](#) | [Data Retrieval](#) | [Maps of New England Plant Distribution](#)

### COMMON NAME

Reed canary-grass  
ribbon grass

### FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Phalaris arundinacea* L.

### FAMILY NAME COMMON

Grass family

### FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Poaceae

### IMAGES



Incursion



Habitat



Habit



Inflorescence



Incursion

close-up

## NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

**Synonyms:** *Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta* L.  
*Phalaris arundinacea* f. *varigata* (Parnell) Druce. (ribbon grass)

## DESCRIPTION

### Botanical Glossary

*Phalaris arundinacea* is a perennial grass that grows 0.5-2 m (1.6-6.5 ft.) tall. The stems can get up to 1.25 cm (0.5 in.) in diameter. The main blades gradually taper and are usually 10-20 cm (4-8 in.) in length and 1-2 cm (0.4-0.8 in.) in width. The blades are solid green, or in the case of some garden varieties (var. *picta* and f. *varigata*) can be green and white striped. The ligule is membranous.

The panicle is between 7-25 cm (2.75-10 in.) in length. Immature panicles are compact and resemble spikes but as they mature they become more open. The plant flowers from late May to August. The inflorescence color changes from green to purplish to tan as the seeds mature. The glumes are 4-6.5 mm (0.15-0.25 in.) long, glabrous to scaberulous, and not winged. There are both sterile and fertile lemmas. The sterile lemmas measure about 1 mm (0.04 in.) in length while the fertile lemmas measure 3-4.5 mm (0.1-0.2 in.) in length. The sterile lemmas have minute hairy scales.

This plant is morphologically variable and at least 10 intraspecific categories have been described.

Page References Bailey 156, Crow & Hellquist 282, Fernald 185, Gleason & Cronquist 765, Holmgren 714, Magee & Ahles 190. See reference section below for full citations.

## SIMILAR SPECIES

*Calamagrostis canadensis* (Michx.) Beauv (bluejoint grass)  
*Dactylis glomerata* L. (orchard grass)  
*Phragmites australis* (Cav.) Trin. ex Steud (common reed)

*Calamagrostis canadensis* generally has a more open inflorescence and lacks the transparent ligule of *Phalaris arundinacea*. *Dactylis glomerata* usually grows in drier sites, has narrower leaf blades, shorter and less pointed inflorescences and the keels of the glumes and lemmas are usually ciliate. *Phragmites australis* is much larger than *Phalaris arundinacea*, reaching 2-4m (6-14ft.) in height, and has hairy rather than membranous ligules.

## REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

The seeds of this plant are most likely passively dispersed and form a dense seed bank.

## DISTRIBUTION

*Phalaris arundinacea* is a circumboreal species that is native to North America as well as Europe. It is found throughout Canada. In the United States, it is present in Alaska, as well as the majority of the continental United States except for a few south/southeastern states. It has been reported from all the states of New England.

## HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Since *Phalaris arundinacea* is native to the United States, it may have been present in the northern parts of New England all along. However, European cultivars were introduced in the early 1800 as forage grasses, and are still used for hay. This grass was also used for revegetation of eroded streambanks. The variegated ribbon grass, which does occasionally naturalize, was introduced into New England through horticultural use, and is still being used for landscaping today.

It is nearly impossible to tell the native and European plants apart except via molecular techniques.

## HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Floodplain Forest  
Herbaceous Wetland  
Lake or Pond  
Planted Forest  
River or Stream  
Roadside  
Wet Meadow  
Yard or Garden

*Phalaris arundinacea* grows best on streambanks, lakesides, marshes, ditches and moist ground.

## THREATS

*Phalaris arundinacea* threatens native plants through its ready spread via rhizomes. It forms dense monocultures that can cover acres. These stands cause the seed bank to become depleted of other species. The denseness of the stands does not allow for native species to readily coexist with it. It has little value for wildlife, and can be too dense to serve as cover for waterfowl and small mammals. It can get into irrigation banks and ditches and cause an increase in siltation. *Phalaris arundinacea* can be allergenic due to the abundant pollen and chaff it produces.

[This plant is often ignored in wetland systems because it often grows with another invader, *Lythrum salicaria* (purple loosestrife) that attracts more attention. Thus, the full extent of its threat may actually be underestimated.]

## MANAGEMENT LINKS

[Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves](#)

[Illinois Natural History Survey](#)

General description and management guidelines

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

[Washington State Department of Ecology](#)

[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

[Ecology and Control of Reed Canary Grass](#)

A report from Applied Ecological Services, Inc.

## DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: Specific photograph or mounted snippet of the inflorescence.

Best time for documentation: Summer

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Integrated Taxonomic Information System](#)

Taxonomic information about the species

[The PLANTS Database](#)

General information and a map

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

Photographs and detailed description.

[Ecology and Control of Reed Canary Grass](#)

A report by Applied Ecological Services, Inc.

[Canadian Wildlife Service](#)

General information

[Washington State Department of Ecology](#)

General information, pictures, economic importance and control

[Illinois Nature Preserves Commission](#)

General information including control

[Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves](#)

General information, control and a photograph

[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

General information and control

[West Virginia University Forage Library Card Catalogue](#)

Details of identification characteristics

[Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide](#)

Photographs and general information

University of Florida, Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants  
Photographs

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## DATA RETRIEVAL

Select a task by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

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## MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click '

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- The whole New England area
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