



Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

Catalog of Species Search Results



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Phragmites australis

(Common reed)

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COMMON NAME

Common reed

FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

Phragmites australis (Cav.) Trin. ex Steud.

FAMILY NAME COMMON

Grass family

FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Poaceae

IMAGES



Incursion



Habit



Size comparison



Incursion



Close-up of



Hairs at



NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

Synonyms: *Phragmites communis* Trin.
Phragmites phragmites (L.) Karst.

DESCRIPTION

Botanical Glossary

Phragmites australis is a stout grass that measures 2-4 m (6.5-13 ft.) in height. It is most often seen in large colonies. The stems and leaves are smooth and glabrous. The gray-green leaves are acuminate in shape, 25-50 cm (10-20 in.) long and 2-3 cm (0.75-1 in.) wide. Long white hairs are present at the leaf-sheath junction.

The light brown to purple inflorescence is 20-40 cm (7.5-15 in.) long. The spikelets have 3-7 flowers and appear between July and September. The flowers are surrounded by silky white hairs. The first glume is narrowly elliptic and blunt, while the second is linear and nearly twice as long as the first. The lemmas are narrow, 8-12 mm (0.3-0.5 in.) wide. The rachilla hairs are white and as long as the lemmas. However, they are not visible until after the flowers bloom. The seeds are brown, light weight, and about 8 mm (0.3 in.) long. In the fall the plant turns brown, and the inflorescences persist throughout the winter.

Page References Crow & Hellquist 261, Gleason & Cronquist 781, Holmgren 732, Magee & Ahles 153. See reference section below for full citations.

SIMILAR SPECIES

Phragmites australis (Cav.) Trin. Ex Steud (Native Phragmites)

Recent research has indicated that there are native populations of *Phragmites australis* in the United States. In 2004 the native populations were described as a subspecies, *Phragmites australis* subsp. *americanus* (Article by Saltonstall, Peterson, & Soreng). The native and non-native plants are very difficult to differentiate. invasivespecies.net has a webpage that illustrates the morphological differences between them. It has been shown that most of the New England populations are non-native.

REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSAL MECHANISMS

Phragmites australis reproduces by means of wind-dispersed seeds and by long rhizomes.

DISTRIBUTION

Phragmites australis is found on every continent in the world except for Antarctica. It is found in every state in the United States except Alaska and Hawaii. It occurs in all of the New England states.

HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Phragmites australis is native to some parts of the United States, and probably came to New England via natural immigration. It is known to have been in New England for at least 4000 years. Unfortunately, some non-native strains of this plant have also made their way here, and it is suspected that these strains are the ones that have exhibited invasive tendencies.

HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND

Coastal Beach or Dune
Coastal Grassland
Edge
Lake or Pond
Open Disturbed Area
River or Stream
Roadside
Salt Marsh
Vacant Lot
Wet Meadow

Phragmites australis can grow in a variety of habitats. It is most often found in wet or marshy areas. This plant grows best in fresh water, but also can be found in brackish, acid or alkaline wetlands. It is also found at the interface between wetlands and uplands.

THREATS

Though some populations of *Phragmites australis* may be native to parts of New England, it becomes problematic when it forms huge monocultures that spread for acres, excluding native species. This often happens when it grows in polluted areas that other plants do not tolerate as well. It can form large, thick walls at the interface of upland and wetland habitats. In New England it is clear that this plant has spread beyond its original range, and is now encroaching into wetlands that contain rare native species.

MANAGEMENT LINKS

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

[Massachusetts Audubon Society](#)

[Plant Conservation Alliance](#)

Fact sheet with management information

[The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group](#)

Invasive Plant Management Guide

DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: A photograph of the habit, flowers or fruit.

Best time for documentation: Summer, fall.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program](#)

Identification, fact sheet, management and distribution information

[Integrated Taxonomic Information System](#)

Taxonomic information

[The PLANTS database](#)

General information and map

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

Extensive description, images, and control information

[Invasiveplants.net](#)

Differences between native and non-native *Phragmites australis*

[USDA Forest Service Fire Effects Information System](#)

Extensive information including a description and ecology of the species

[Virginia Native Plant Society](#)

General information including control

[Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide](#)

Photographs and description

[National Invasive Species Information Center](#)

Links to more information

[Virginia Tech Weed Identification Guide](#)

Description and photographs

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DATA RETRIEVAL

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MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

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