

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Common Reed

*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*



Leslie J. Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Background:

Although this species is indigenous to North America (ssp. *americanus*), a more invasive genotype, originating in the Old World, was introduced in the late 18th or early 19th centuries. Common reed most likely arrived in contaminated ballast material.

### Range:

Native to Eurasia, the Old World genotype of common reed can now be found throughout southern Canada and the lower 48 states.

### Description:

Common reed is a tall, perennial grass that can reach 15 feet in height. A dense network of roots and rhizomes reach a depth of three feet underground. Its leaves are elongate with rough margins. In late July and August, feathery flower plumes, purple or golden in color, tower over wetlands. Stands include both live and dead stems from the previous year's growth.



Rebekah D. Wallace, University of Georgia  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Habitat:

Common reed can be found in tidal and non-tidal brackish and freshwater marshes, river edges, shores of lakes and ponds, roadsides and disturbed areas. It is especially common in alkaline and slightly saline environments, but is quite tolerant of a variety of wetland conditions.

### Biology and Spread:

Colonization of new sites is typically accomplished by wind-dispersed seeds, which are produced in abundance, but at low viability. Fragments of rhizomes may be washed to new locations along rivers and shorelines or transported by heavy machinery. Common reed spreads horizontally by sending out quickly growing rhizome runners.

### Ecological Threat:

Common reed can rapidly take over wetland communities, crowding out native plants, changing hydrology, altering wildlife habitat and increasing fire potential.



John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## How to Control this Species:

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### Physical

Cutting, pulling, or mowing can be done in late July, which removes most of the food reserves produced by the plant that season. The placement of black plastic over cut stems has had some success at dampening populations.

Excavation of sediments may also be effective, but small fragments of root left in the soil may lead to reestablishment.

All cut shoots should be removed to prevent re-sprouting.

### Chemical

Glyphosate-based herbicides are effective for established populations. Be sure to use a formulation approved for aquatic use.

Herbicides are best applied in early fall after the plant has flowered, as a foliar spray.

Monitor the site in the following seasons to treat remnant sprouts to prevent re-establishment. Treatment will often need to be repeated for several years to prevent any surviving rhizomes from re-sprouting.



Steve Dewey, Utah State University  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Look-A-Likes:

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Native and non-native genotypes of common reed are quite similar. Common reed could also be confused with wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*) and reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*).



Wild Rice

Richard Old, XID Services, Inc.  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### References:

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Global Invasive Species Database: <http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?fr=1&si=301>

Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group:  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/phau1.htm>

### For More Information:

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DCNR Invasive Species Site: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:  
[http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf)