

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Common reed

*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*



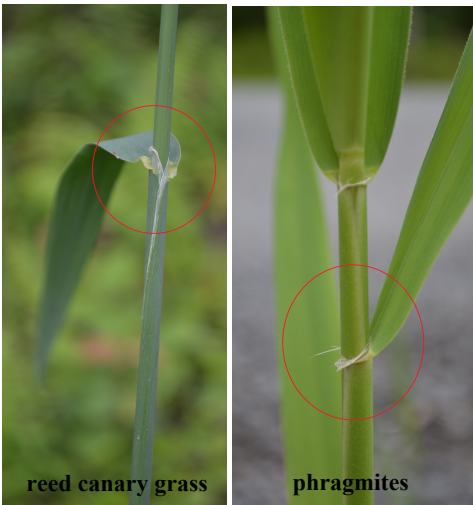
Leslie J. Mehrhoff, Univ. of Connecticut

### 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.



Brett Pifer, DCNR - BOF

### 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.



Kelly Stich, DCNR - BOF

### Ecological Threat:

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

### 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.



Steve Dewey, Utah State Univ.

### Look-A-Likes:

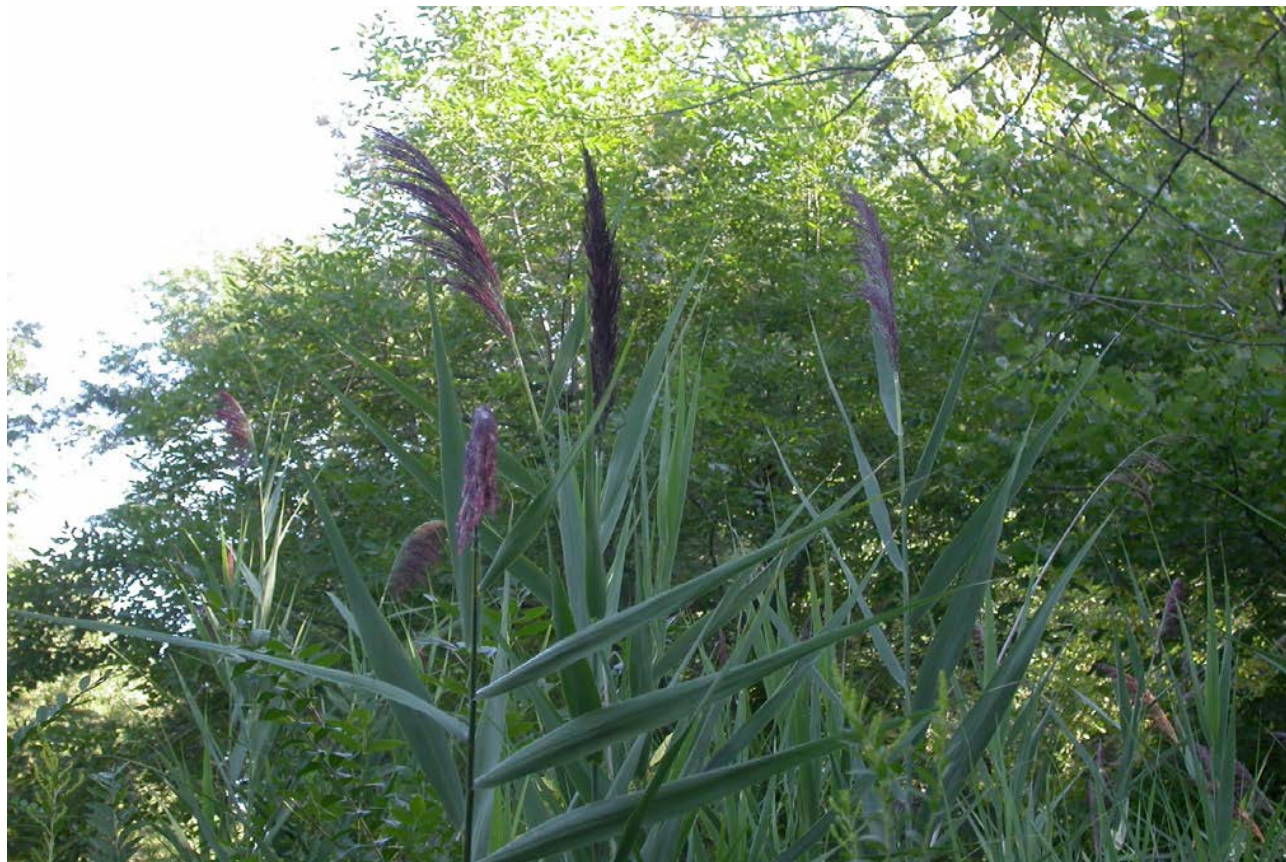
Native and non-native genotypes of common reed are quite similar. Common reed could also be confused with wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*) and reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*).



Richard Old, XID Services, Inc.



## Common reed (*Phragmites australis*)



Mature *Phragmites* in late summer. (Photo by Scott Namestnik)



Early *Phragmites* infestation at a well pad edge.



## Common reed (*Phragmites australis*)



Mature rhizome of *Phragmites* in established stand.

### ***Phragmites* Treatment Guidance**

If the population is small (less than 20 individuals), it may be possible to hand-dig the population. Extreme care should be taken to ensure that the rhizome system is removed intact and all new off-sprouts are found and removed. All plant material and rhizome should be bagged and removed from the site.

If herbicide is deemed necessary due to the size of the population, consider first cutting the stems in early summer, depleting reserves in the rhizomes. Eight weeks later, apply herbicide to the resprouted plants. Consider using imazapyr (Habitat), imazamox (Clearcast), or glyphosate to treat *Phragmites*. If cutting prior to treatment is not utilized, treatment should be conducted after the plant has flowered (typically early July).

Continued monitoring should be done to allow for treatment of re-sprouts and new plants established from the existing seed bank.