



INVASIVE PLANTS OF OHIO

Fact Sheet 5

Common Reed Grass (Phragmites)

Phragmites australis ssp. *australis*

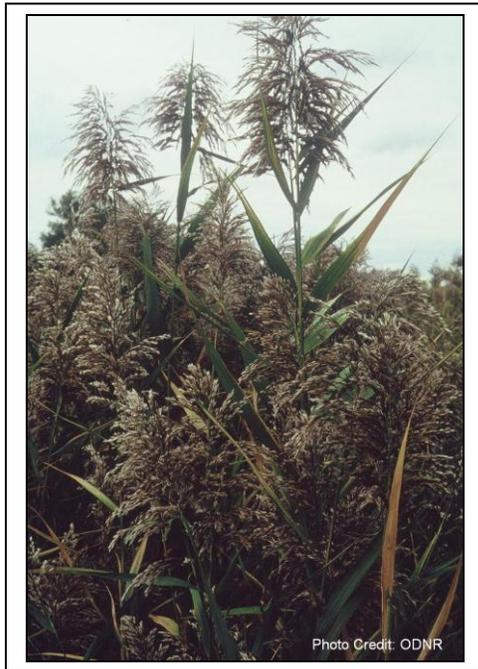


Photo Credit: ODNR

DESCRIPTION:

Common reed grass is a tall, perennial wetland grass, 5-10 feet in height. Both native and introduced Phragmites are found in the state. The introduced Phragmites forms a dense network of rhizomes with deep roots. Vertical stalks arise from the rhizomes forming dense colonies. The stiff, hollow stalks support elongate and flat 1 ½ to 2 inch wide leaves. Flowers form bushy panicles in late July and August and are usually purple or golden in color. As seeds mature, the panicles begin to look “fluffy” due to the hairs on the seeds and they take on a grey sheen.

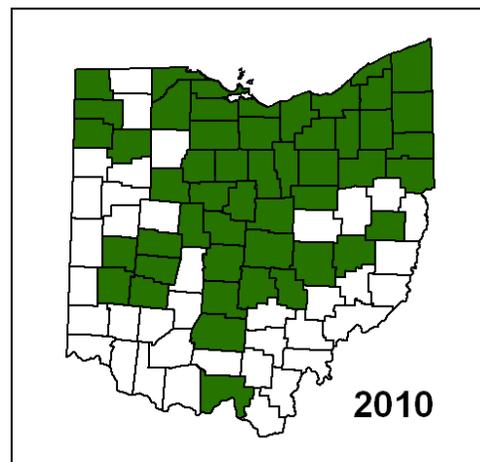
It is difficult to distinguish native Phragmites from the introduced. However, a number of morphological characteristics have been identified that can be used to determine a population’s type. Characteristics that separate the native from the introduced Phragmites include

stems that are smooth, shiny and often purplish, and short ligules between 1-1.7 mm in length, for the native type.

Introduced common reed grass is thought to have arrived in North America accidentally, most likely in ballast material in the late 18th or early 19th centuries. It established itself along the Atlantic coast and over the course of the 20th century, spread across the continent. In Ohio, the introduced subspecies is found throughout the state with it being more common in northern half.

HABITAT:

Common reed grass is found in brackish and freshwater marshes, river edges, shores of lakes and ponds, roadsides, fens, swamps, wet meadows, and disturbed moist/wet areas.



Map based on records as of 2010.

INVASIVE CHARACTERISTICS:

Common reed grass quickly invades a site and can take over a marsh community, crowding out native plants, changing marsh hydrology, altering wildlife habitat, and increasing fire potential. Its tall stems and dense growth pattern block light to other plants and its rhizomes spread rapidly across the soil surface (10-20 feet in length), creating a monoculture stand. Phragmites can spread to new areas by seed dispersal and vegetative rhizome fragments. It had been thought for years that Phragmites did not produce many viable seeds, but recent research at The Ohio State University has documented that seeds are typically viable and germinate in mudflat conditions (Campbell 2010).



CONTROL:

Mechanical:

Cutting, pulling or mowing can be done in late July for several years. Prescribed burning after the plant has flowered, either alone or in combination with herbicide treatment, may be effective. Burning after herbicide treatment reduces standing dead stem and litter biomass which may help to encourage germination

of native plants in the following growing season. Plants should not be burned in the spring or summer before flowering as this may stimulate growth.

Chemical:

Herbicide application using Rodeo, Accord, Glypro, AquaNeat, or Habitat/Polaris is most effective in the late summer or early fall, after tasseling, and should be applied at least 2 years in a row depending on the size of the population. Fusilade, a grass-specific herbicide, can be applied in non-aquatic habitats. Habitat/Polaris is best used for extensive monocultures as it is a residual herbicide, but is extremely effective on Phragmites. Be sure to use a non-ionic surfactant with the herbicide in wet areas. Application methods may include aerial spraying, hand-held or backpack sprayers, and hand-wicking. Extensive populations have rhizome networks and will require multiple applications to achieve effective control.

Biological: There are several native insects that feed on Phragmites as well as a few Eurasian insects that feed on Phragmites that have become naturalized in North America. Their impact and distribution are currently unknown.

Credits and additional information:

Plant Conservation Alliance-Alien Plant Working Group
Ohio Department of Natural Resources, www.ohiodnr.gov
The Nature Conservancy, Ohio Chapter
Cornell University, www.invasiveplants.net
OIPC website, www.oipc.info