



BRANDYWINE  
CONSERVANCY

Preserving Our  
Land & Water

# COMMON REED

(Phragmites australis)

Phragmites can **develop into thick stands** effectively crowding and shading out native wetland and coastal species. As more and more crowding occurs, **species diversity is reduced** and **wildlife habitat quality is degraded**. Common reed may pose a **fire hazard** when located near residential areas.

## IDENTIFY

COMMON REED | Brandywine Conservancy



### CHARACTERISTICS

Common reed is often referred to simply as “phragmites.” It is a tall perennial grass that can commonly grow up to 15 feet tall. Common reed is a warm season grass with hollow, rigid, woody stems and a vigorous root system consisting of horizontal underground stems, called “rhizomes.” It has long leaves with rough margins.

### WHERE FROM

Originally native to Europe and Asia, this Old World genotype was most likely introduced in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, via peat and sediments trapped in the ballasts of ships. This ballast was discharged throughout Atlantic coastal marshes. There are varieties of phragmites native to North America in the Great Lakes region, but these grow more slowly and less aggressively than this non-native strain.

### WHERE FOUND

Common reed can be found in southern Canada and throughout the U.S. It grows in tidal and non-tidal brackish or freshwater areas, marshes, river edges, shores of lakes and ponds, along roadsides, and in other disturbed areas. It is very tolerant of a variety of wetland conditions.



COMMON REED FLOWERS  
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COMMON REED STEM  
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COMMON REED RESPROUTS  
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## CONTROL

### MECHANICAL AND CHEMICAL METHOD

The best approach for control is to combine a mechanical and chemical method. First, cut the patch of common reed during the summer months and allow resprouting. Follow this with a second cutting to exhaust the nutrients in the root stock and allow resprouting once again. In the fall, apply an

application of glyphosate approved for wetland areas (e.g., *Rodeo*). This should control the population and allow for native seed sources to emerge the following spring. If re-sprouts occur the following year, apply glyphosate carefully by hand (not broadcast spray) to individual plants to

keep native vegetation from being affected. Use two gloves: a rubber glove that extends to your elbow with a cotton glove on top. Have glyphosate pre-mixed in a squirt bottle. Walk the wetland and apply the herbicide to individual blades as they are found.

### PRESCRIBED FIRE

**To be performed only by a professional trained in the application of controlled fires.**

Controlled burns may be used after herbicide treatments to remove large masses of dead phragmites.

## REMEMBER

When removing, **be careful** not to remove or destroy desirable species.

Applications made too early in the season or too soon after cutting do not translocate to the rhizomes, and only injure the shoots.

After herbicide treatment, it is important that you do not disturb the rhizome system through any type of excavation or vehicle rutting.

*(Read and follow all herbicide labels carefully before use.)*

SOURCES  
U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Plant Conservation Alliance ([www.nps.gov/plants/](http://www.nps.gov/plants/))  
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library ([www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov))  
The Nature Conservancy ([www.tnc.org](http://www.tnc.org))  
Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation of Natural Resources ([www.dcnr.state.pa.us](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us))