

Common Reed, *Phragmites australis*

Common reed is a perennial grass species that is distributed throughout the US. Found in wet areas, this species is known to grow along marshes, streams, rivers, lakes and roadsides. It is able to grow in tidal areas and is tolerant of moderate salinity levels.

Historically, there is evidence that Native Americans used common reed as a building material to construct a variety of items, including arrow shafts, musical instruments, mats and adobe houses.

Common reed has both native and non-native subspecies that are visually similar. In New England marshes, the non-native subspecies has displaced the native form and is considered to be invasive. The non-native species was most likely introduced to the Atlantic coast accidentally in the late 1700s or early 1800s.

Leaves: Thin, flat, yellow-green leaves grow in an alternate pattern along the stem. They are typically 1-1.5" in width and taper towards the end. Leaves may grow to over a foot in length.

Stems: Stems grow from underground rhizomes and many clones may extend up from a connected network. The hollow stems are woody in appearance and grow to a height of 6-12'.

Flowers: In late summer, common reed produces plume-like blooms that mature from purple to a golden brown color. The blooms consist of compact flower clusters surrounded by thin hairs that create a silky appearance. They typically hang to one side from the top of the reed.

Seeds and Fruit: Seeds form in tightly arranged clusters on the flowering plume, the seed head. As it develops, the fruit hardens from a soft, more watery structure into a grain.

Sources and Additional Information:

USDA, NRCS. 2014. The PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>, 31 July 2014). National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA.

"Common Reed". Ohio Perennial and Biennial Weed Guide. The Ohio State University. Web. (31 July 2014) <http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/weedguide/default.asp>

Saltonstall, K., Burdick, D., Miller, S., and Smith B. 2005. Native and Non-native Phragmites: Challenges in Identification, Research, and Management of the Common Reed. National Estuarine Research Reserve Technical Report Series 2005.

Note: Signs of the Seasons observers are monitoring both subspecies together and do not need to differentiate between the subspecies. For more information, a comparison guide on how to distinguish the native subspecies from the non-native invasive can be found at: "Phragmites Identification page". Oregon Department of Agriculture. <http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/pages/phragmitesidentification.aspx>



Distribution of *Phragmites australis*, USDA PLANTS Database