

# Phragmites or Common Reed

## (*Phragmites australis*)

Poaceae (grass family)

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Phragmites or "phrag" is a tall, warm season, perennial grass. The stems or "culms" are smooth, rigid but hollow. Can be as high as 16 feet tall. It has a feathery plume-like flower head pointing upwards and consisting of many long but thin branches. The plumes have flowers that range in color from whitish/brown to purplish. Blue/green elongate leaves between 1-1.5 inches long.

Habitat: occurs in both pristine and disturbed areas including tidal and non-tidal wetlands, fresh-water and brackish marshes, the shore of rivers, lakes and ponds and even roadside ditches. It prefers full sun and can tolerate fresh to mesohaline salinities (<http://nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/phau.htm>)



*Joseph McCauley, USFWS*

**Similar species:** Native phragmites and other tall plants with "plume-like" inflorescences are similar in appearance.

**Introduction:** One theory about the introduction of phragmites is that it was originally introduced in the 1700s through ship ballast water from Europe. Although genetic studies of the plant indicate three different lineages, the European form is considered invasive.

**Ecological threat:**

Phrag spreads not only by seed distribution through wind and water. It also spreads vegetatively through rhizomes and rhizome fragments.

It often becomes the dominant species in any area where it grows. Its dense monotype stands of growth push out other plants, alters wetland ecology, reduces and degrades wildlife habitat and increase potential for fire.

Established populations are difficult to control due to the methods by which it spreads and the nature of the areas where it is typically found. Removal is also difficult because due to difficulty of access to wetland areas. Burning has been successful throughout the Mid-Atlantic region while systematic herbicides (glyphosate) are also effective. Control must be monitored and followed thoroughly to ensure that any remaining plants do not survive.

Phragmites are listed in several states as a "noxious weed" "prohibited" "plant pest" "invasive" and "banned"

Prepared by Tess Belcher, 5/2012

Sources: <http://plants.usda.gov>  
<http://nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/phau.htm>