

Who we are . . .

Our Mission: Wisconsin Wetlands Association, a non-profit organization, is dedicated to protecting, restoring, and enjoying wetlands and associated ecosystems through science-based education, advocacy and action.

Our Members: Established in 1970, Wisconsin Wetlands Association is the only statewide organization focused exclusively on wetland protection. Our more than 700 members include wetland scientists and educators, conservationists, outdoor enthusiasts, concerned citizens and local and regional organizations. Please join us today!

Wisconsin Wetlands Association
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Visit our website: www.wiscwetlands.org

Thanks to our sponsors & partners . . .



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Wisconsin Wetlands Association

Invasive Species Program

Phragmites



Common Reed Grass A Field Guide

Phragmites - Common Reed Grass

Phragmites (*frag-MY-teez*) australis, also known as Giant or Common Reed Grass, is a wetland grass that can grow up to 4 m tall. It can reproduce by seeds, but more commonly, it spreads through wetlands via rhizomes (underground roots that can produce new shoots).

Phragmites is native to Wisconsin, but there are many exotic strains here as well. These exotic strains are problematic because they invade a variety of wetland habitats, drive out the native vegetation and reduce biodiversity. This causes problems for many animals that depend upon the native plants for food. The dense stand also makes it impossible for waterfowl to forage or build nests, activities which require an open wetland habitat. There is also some evidence that the native strain is invasive.

Physical removal of Phragmites australis is costly and may even encourage its spread. Carefully timed applications of glyphosate have shown success in controlling the plant, but this method is also costly and repeated applications of the toxic chemical may kill beneficial species and pollute water resources. While 26 insect species in the United States are known to eat Phragmites, most of these are not found in Wisconsin. Several European insect species have also shown promise as a control for Phragmites. Research into these species, and their possible introduction to control exotic Phragmites in the U.S., is currently being conducted.

Wisconsin Wetlands Association has joined the effort to understand the scale of the Phragmites problem in Wisconsin and the search for a solution.

For more information see: www.wiscwetlands.org
Call Wisconsin Wetlands Association: 608-250-9977



Some Keys for Identifying Phragmites . . .

Identification:

At first, exotic Phragmites might seem difficult to differentiate from native phragmites and other wetland reeds and sedges. However, there are some tell-tale signs that will help you correctly identify this unwanted invader.

Phragmites is a very tall plant. Usually over five feet tall, it can reach up to four meters! The leaves are dark green and wave like pennants, large and flat, about 2.5 inches wide. In winter the hardy stems turn tan, but remain erect.

Phragmites inflorescence can be up to 1.25 feet long, with many spikelets. Each spikelet has 3 to 7 flowers and is about 3/4 inches long. Mature flowers (right) have a feathery appearance in late summer. Immature flowers are tighter and reddish in color.

Leaves of the exotic strain are dark green/bluish. The sheath attaches at the base of the leaf, wrapping around the stem.



Exotic vs. Native:

Exotic stands of

Phragmites are denser with a darker green color (on the left).

Native stands have fewer plants per foot and are a lighter green color (on the right).



In **fl**orescence, Native plants' inflorescences (right) are often sparse, while exotic plants' inflorescences are much more dense (left). Native plants also flower earlier, July - August, while exotic plants flower a bit later, August - September.



Stem **C**olor: Exotic plants' leaves stay tightly clasped to the stems, which are green or tan (top). Native plants have loose leaf sheaths that fall off easily and the stems turn reddish-brown (bottom).



Stem **D**etails: Exotic plant stems are tough, dull and ribbed - these ridges are visible to the naked eye (top). Native plant stems are soft, smooth and shiny; they often have dark spots at the nodes (bottom).



Habitat:

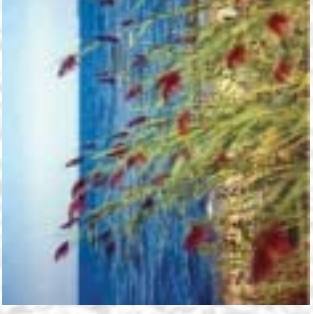
Marshes are characterized by permanent or semi-permanent shallow water and emergent vegetation (plants that are rooted in the soil under the water and whose parts stick up above the surface), including the marsh trademark - cattails.



Wet meadows are composed almost entirely of perennial forbs, grasses, and sedges. Wet meadows are characterized by saturated soil and a lack of trees and shrubs, which makes them susceptible to Phragmites invasion.



Shoreline wetlands grow around rivers (riparian wetlands) or lakes can be marshes, wet meadows, or other types of wetlands.



Man-made habitats, such as road ditches, canals, and sludge ponds, are common, saturated-soil habitats for Phragmites, due to their disturbed soil and low position.



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