

Common Reed

Phragmites australis

Biology:

A tall herbaceous, perennial wetland grass ranging in height from three to 15 feet. Horizontal stems (rhizomes) give rise to annual erect shoots that support broad sheath-like leaves. Leaves and stems are stiff and sharp, due to a high content of cellulose and silica. Large feathery plumes of flowers change from a purple-brown color in July to tan or grey by late in the season. Plants can sprout from a rhizome fragment or from seed and can form colonies hundreds of acres in size.

Habitat:

Phragmites thrives in sunny wetland habitats. It is commonly found in the moist soil of shallow brackish and freshwater marshes. It also grows along riverbanks and lakeshores and can form floating mats in deeper waters. This species is prevalent in the disturbed and degraded soils found along roadsides, ditches, and dredged areas. It can tolerate salt water and a pH range of 3.7 to 9.

Origin:

Phragmites is native to Europe and Africa but is now widespread throughout the world and the U.S. There is also a native species but it too may have found a new niche in human-disturbed habitat.

NY and Adirondack Range:

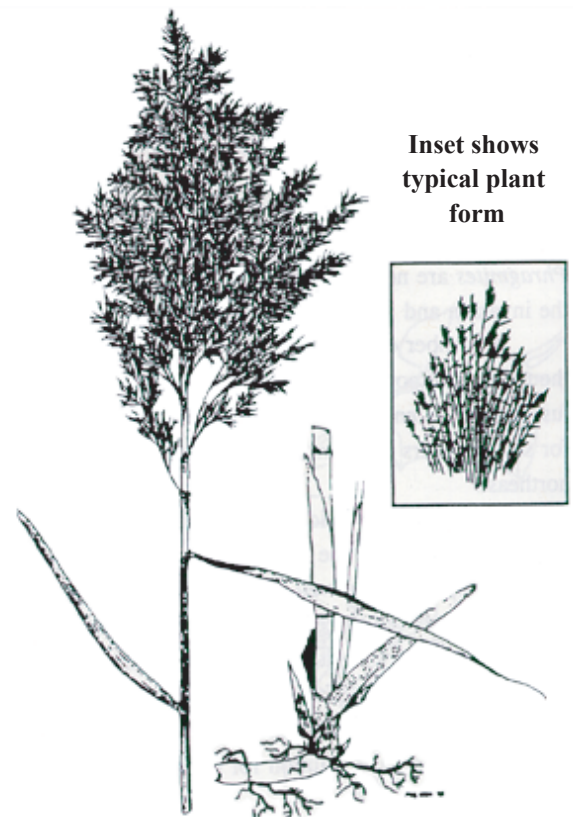
Throughout NYS. Small stands throughout the Park and intermittent expansive stands along the Northway.

Spread:

Spreads rapidly through prolific seeds and underground root systems called rhizomes. Rhizome fragments are dispersed by water, animals, and construction equipment.

Problems:

Invasive stands can quickly replace desirable wetland species such as wild rice, cattails, and native wetland orchids. Monocultures as large as 7,000 acres have been documented.



(Illustration by Judy Preston - The Nature Conservancy of CT)