

Phragmites australis (Cav.) Trin. ex Steud.

Common Name: Common reed (giant reed, cane grass)

Growth Form: Grass

Life Span: Perennial

Origin: Native and Europe

Season: Warm

Reproduction: Rhizomes, stolons, rarely by seeds

Height: 1-6 m (3.2-20 ft)

Inflorescence: Panicle (15-50 cm long, 5-20 cm wide), plume-like, much branched, branches and top nodding at maturity, densely flowered, tawny to purplish

Spikelet: Florets 3-7 (1-1.8 cm long); lemmas sharply pointed, without hair, nerves 3; lowest floret staminate; florets exceeded by the hairs of the rachilla

Awns: Fertile lemmas awned

Glumes: Unequal; first glume 2.5-5.5 mm long, second glume 5-8 mm long

Sheath: Open, smooth, margins with fine hairs

Blade: Flat (15-60 cm long, 1-6 cm wide), tapering to long-attenuate tips; margins serrate, without hair; upper surface ridge-veined, lower surface without hair or sparsely hairy

Ligule: Membranous (0.3-1 mm long), backed by both short and long silky hairs

Culm: Erect, round (5-20 mm in diameter), smooth, hollow, sometimes purplish

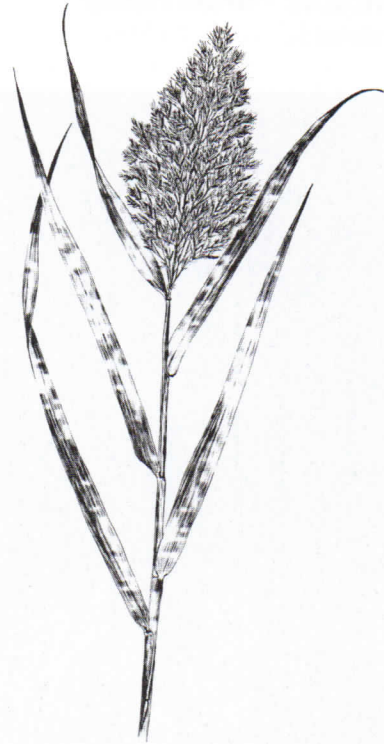
Rhizomes: Extensive (up to 10 m in length), stout (up to 2 cm in diameter), scaly

Where Found: Throughout the Great Plains forming dense patches in wet and moderately fertile soils along banks of ponds, lakes, streams, marshes, roads, ditches and in wet fields. It tolerates moderate salinity. (NE, SD, ND, KS, OK, TX, MN, IA, MO, MT, WY, CO, NM, AB, SK, & MB)

Uses and Values: It is readily eaten by cattle and horses when it is immature. Seeds are eaten by waterfowl, and the rhizomes and stems are eaten by muskrats. Redwing blackbirds preferentially nest in common reed.

Historical: Pieces of the stems were used to make pen points in early America. Some Native Americans used common reed for thatching, mats, and arrow shafts. Rhizomes were used as emergency food.

Other: Characteristics of introduced common reed include a dense inflorescence, yellow rhizomes that are oval in cross section, persistent leaf sheaths in fall, and rough stems that are tan in color. Native common reed has a sparse inflorescence, white and round rhizomes, leaf sheaths that are easily detached in fall, and smooth culms that are red to chestnut in color.



Panicles are plume-like, densely flowered, and tawny to purplish in color.

Rhizomes are extensive.

