Common Reed Grass

*Phragmites australis*

Robust, aggressive grass that forms dense monocultural thickets, 5 – 13’ high. Turns brown in autumn.

**Where found:** Wetland fringes where saltwater & freshwater marshes meet; also in freshwater marshes, roadsides. Grows in from fairly dry to inundated sites.

Leaves alternate, 10 – 20” long & 1” wide, yellow-green to gray-green, long white hairs at junction of leaf sheath. Leaf sheath difficult to remove.

Stems green, stiff in the wind, dull-looking & ribbed beneath leaf sheath. Stem base is tan in summer & winter.

Flowers silky plumes, light brown to purple, 7 – 15” long atop stalks, August – September. Turn gray & fluffy later as they go to seed & remain on plant through winter. Seeds brown, 1/3”.

**Similar native plant:** Native Phragmites subspecies (*P.a. americanus*) very similar, found in moist but not inundated sites, leaf sheaths fall off, stems bend in the wind, stem texture is smooth & shiny beneath sheaths, stems can be spotted, stem color chestnut-reddish (summer) & light chestnut to brownish green (winter), flowers earlier (July – Aug.)

Harpstown Invasive Plants Partnership, 2015 (4/2015)

[Sources: Maine Invasive Plants, bulletin #2532; Invasive Plant Atlas of New England; invasivespecies.net]
**Common Reed (Phragmites australis) Best Control Practices:**
First, read the FAQs (see last page) to guide your decisions on How, When, Why, and What control efforts. Then proceed with the following:

- Cut or mow to 6” above ground level in mid-late July, or snap below the water level 2-3 times/year. Compost cut material in dry, upland areas. Repeat cutting until no re-sprouting occurs. Expect to treat for 2-3 years.
- If permitted, after seed head forms, tie together and cut stems to 3’, then spray 25% glyphosate into stems. Monitor and repeat for 3 years.
- Glyphosate treatment is possible in wetlands, but only by licensed commercial applicator and DEP permit.

Source:

[Casco Bay Invasive Species Network, Winning the War on Weeds (p. 24)]
FAQs: To eliminate or control invasive plants in Harpswell?

Choosing a control strategy
Choosing a control strategy requires careful thought as to the size and severity of the infestation and its proximity to water and other natural resources. The Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP) urges land owners to use mechanical (as opposed to chemical) controls whenever possible. Herbicide application within 25 feet of the water is not allowed in Harpswell. Check the Town of Harpswell’s Pesticide Ordinance.

Why control invasive plants?
Infestations of invasive plants damage the lands and waters that native plants and animals need to survive. They out-compete and displace native plant species. Livestock avoid grazing on many invasives (thistles/euphorbia, black swallow-wort), encouraging spread. Invasive seeds may also contaminate hay. Some invasives shelter mice, so increase the numbers of ticks (barberries), and others yield poisonous chemicals (euphorbia, black swallow-wort) that can affect human and animal health. Some invasive roots exude chemicals that poison neighboring plants (knapweed, black swallow-wort).

When is the best time to control invasive plants?
There isn’t one season that works perfectly for all invasives. When trying to prevent invasives from entering the seed-spreading period, manually attack them any time you can. But, when chemicals are needed, leaf-spraying must be done on green leaves, while the cut-and-paint stem applications are only effective during the late season, not when sap is actively flowing. Be sure to follow the guidelines advised on HIPP’s website to time your efforts.

Why avoid chemical herbicides?
The most commonly-used herbicides for invasive plant control are glyphosate (Roundup) and Triclopyr (Garlon 4 and 3A). Glyphosate is known to be mildly toxic to bees, which are already threatened. Triclopyr is slightly toxic to birds, fish, and aquatic invertebrates, and can cause severe eye damage.

Why use chemicals?
Sometimes, cautiously using herbicides is less disturbing to the environment than other possible control methods. At other times, the plant infestation is too large or dense to realistically remove mechanically. If chemicals are needed, follow professional advice for when and how much chemical to use. Using chemicals that are mixed too strongly can damage the visible leaves while never seeping into the root structure to kill the plant.

When using chemicals why not just use Roundup (or Triclopyr) for all the invasives?
Neither Roundup nor Triclopyr works reliably for every invasive plant. Following the guidelines advised on HIPP’s website will help you choose the right herbicide for the job, save you money, and minimize environmental damage.

Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership Plant Fact Sheets
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