COMMON REED

invasive fact sheet

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Common reed grows in Vermont's wetlands and marshes, and along river and lake shores. This plant is **easy to see in August** when its flower stalks are in bloom.

Recognize common reed

© Nava Tabak/IPANE

broad, flat green leaves

purple flowers in tassels on top of stems

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tall grass, reaching 13 feet in height

The Problem

Common reed *(Phragmites australis)* replaces native grasses, sedges and herbaceous plants. It provides poor quality habitat for insects, birds and amphibians. Fish populations that reproduce in wetlands and marshes inundated with phragmites suffer higher egg and juvenile mortality. The plant also exudes allelopathic compounds from its roots, causing root death of nearby native plants.

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Learn to distinguish native and exotic phragmites at www.invasiveplants.net/phragmites.

Wise On Weeds!

The Nature Conservancy, Montpelier, Vermont
802-229-4425 x120
www.nature.org/vermont/weeds

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COMMON REED

Remove

Mechanical control

- √ Caution!! Since common reed is a grass, cutting several times during a season at the wrong times may increase stand density.
- √ Hand-cut individual stems at the end of July when most of the plant's food reserves are in the aerial portion of the plant, before the flowers produce seed. Plants should be cut below the lowest leaf, leaving a 6 inch or shorter stump. Hand-held cutters, gas-powered hedge trimmers and weed whackers with a circular blade are particularly efficient. You can also cut and mulch dead stems in winter to remove them and promote germination of other species. Repeat in second year and then every three to five years.
- √ Cut stems can be composted or allowed to decay in a dry area.
- √ Some patches may be too large to cut by hand, but repeated cutting of the perimeter of a stand can prevent vegetative expansion. Mow large stands of common reed annually between June and July to reduce plant vigor and stem density. Common reed will spread by seed or root pieces, so be sure to thoroughly clean all mowing equipment after its use to prevent the reed's spread.
- √ After cutting, lay a sheet of black plastic over the area. Use sand bags or bricks to secure the edges and keep covered for a year. Check for new growth around the plastic.

R.A. Howard @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Chemical control

- √ **For small infestations:** Cut the plants back in the winter. In late summer, cut stems of common reed and drip an 18-21% glyphosate solution into the stem.
- √ **For larger infestations:** Cut the plants back in the winter. In late July or early August, when the plants are flowering, use a car wash mitt to wipe a 2% glyphosate solution onto the entire plant. Repeat in following years as necessary.

Safe Chemical Application

- √ ***The label found on the herbicide container is the law.*** Read this label in its entirety. It will tell you what concentrations to use, what protective clothing to wear, how to apply the product, and what environmental and human health hazards are associated with the chemical. Improperly used herbicides can cause both short- and long-term health and environmental problems. More is not better! Pesticide labels can be found at http://www.msds.com/.
- √ ***Use aquatic formulations within 10 feet of water.*** You need a permit to apply herbicides in wetlands. You cannot apply herbicides within 100 feet of a wellhead. Contact VT DEC at 802-241-3761 for more information.
- √ ***You need to be certified to apply herbicides on land that you do not own.***
- √ ***Hire a contractor to manage large infestations.*** A knowledgeable contractor will help create an effective management plan. For a list of certified contractors, contact the Department of Agriculture at 802-828-3482.

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