

# Common reed

---

**POACEAE - Grass Family**

*Phragmites australis* (Cav.) Trin. ex Steud. [= *P. communis* Trin., *P. phragmites* (L.) Karst.]





# *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- 60cm 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

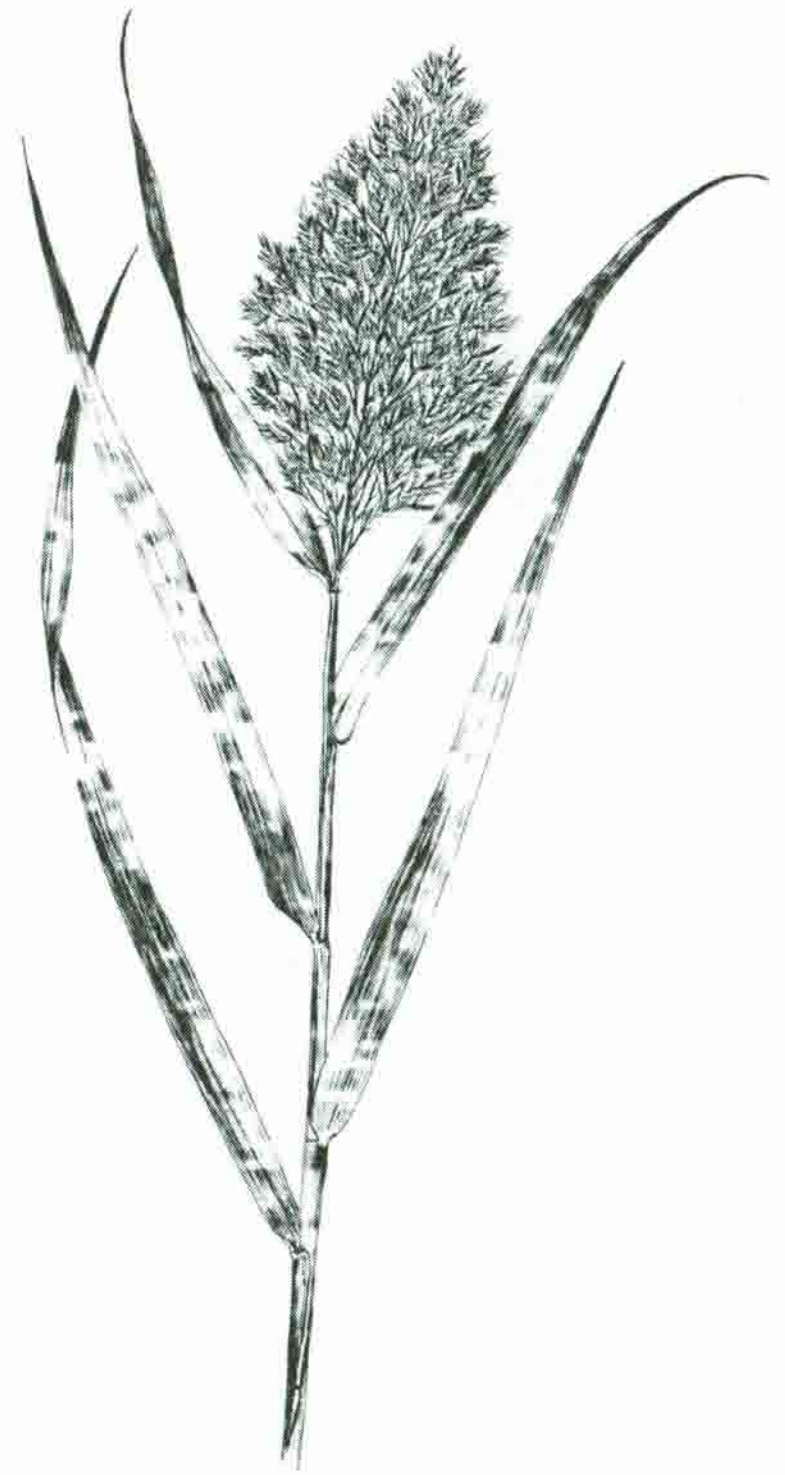
**Rhizomes:** Extensive (up to 10 m in length), stout (up to 2 cm in diameter), scaly

**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.*

