

# INVASIVE PHRAGMITES

In North America, *Phragmites* is represented by three distinct lineages based on genetic analysis. One is native and endemic to North America, one is found in both North and South America, and the third is introduced and invasive.

While both are found in wetlands, and along lakes and rivers, the introduced *Phragmites* is more likely to be found in disturbed sites where soil may have been exposed and nutrient inputs may be high, such as along roadsides, construction sites, or near agricultural fields.

Introduced *Phragmites* is a vigorous plant that, once established, rapidly takes over, creating dense patches that consume available growing space and push out other plants, including the native subspecies. It also alters wetland hydrology, increases the potential for fire, and may reduce and degrade wetland wildlife habitat due, in part, to its dense growth habit.

Spread of *Phragmites* to new locales is through seed, which is dispersed by wind and water, and vegetative means, through the movement of rhizomes or rhizome fragments. Individual *Phragmites* plants produce hundreds to thousands of seeds per year.

## TELLING NATIVE FROM INVASIVE



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It can be difficult to distinguish between both forms, the following are provided as a guidance.

## NATIVE

### Growth habit/density.

Low density stands often mixed with other native plants but it can occur in very dense stands more typical of invasive form.

**Leaf sheaths** fall off the stem easily once the leaf dies particularly at the lower nodes where they may no longer be present when the plant flowers.

**Leaves** are typically lighter in color than the exotic, often yellow-green.

**Stems** are somewhat delicate, shiny, smooth, and are often red colored towards base, particularly where exposed to direct sunlight. May not remain standing through winter.

**Black spots on stems** can occur and are caused by a native fungus that has not adapted to the invasive.

**Flowers** occur 3-4 months after spring growth; plumes are sparse and may not persist through winter.

## INVASIVE

### Growth habit/density.

Typically forms very dense stands which include both live stems and standing dead stems from the previous year.

**Leaf sheaths** adhere tightly to the stem throughout the growing season and persist on the stem as long as it remains standing.

**Leaves** are blue green and usually darker than the native forms.

**Stems** can reach 15 feet, are very rigid, and are slightly ridged with a rougher texture than the native.

**No spots on stems.** Fungal spots are not typically present but there may be some mildew.

**Flowers** occur typically in August and September and form bushy panicles that are usually purple or golden in color.

## CONTROL

**Mechanical:** Cutting, pulling or mowing can be done in late July and repeated for several years. Carefully remove all cut shoots and seed heads to prevent re-sprouting.

**Chemical: Application methods and chemicals used** will depend on the associated plant community and location. Please speak to Butler SWCD (513) 887-3720

**Biological:** No biological controls are known at this time.



Find out more at  
[www.ButlerSWCD.org](http://www.ButlerSWCD.org)

