

## Hints for Controlling Introduced (Invasive) Phragmites



### What is it?

Invasive *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed) is a very aggressive, densely growing member of the grass family. It has 5' to 13' high stalks and produces large plume-like flower spikes in late summer. Phragmites can reproduce by seed, but its most active method of spreading is by a thick root system of rhizomes.

It is important to control the growth of Invasive Phragmites on your property because it grows in such dense patches that it eventually chokes out the native plants growing in that area.

### Is Your Patch Native Phragmites or Introduced (Invasive) Phragmites?

Native phragmites is not considered harmful since its looser growing habit allows other plants to grow amongst it.

If the Phragmites in your patch is the only plant growing there, it is likely to be the Introduced (Invasive) species.

For further identifying characteristics, see page 3 of this PDF: "Identifying Native and Introduced (Invasive) Phragmites" which is a portion of a power point presentation prepared by the National Park Service.

### Brace yourself for a battle!

Invasive Phragmites is tenacious! It is unlikely that you will completely get rid of the plant, but performing control measures in successive years will weaken its growth and spread.

### What NOT to do:

1. Do not cut Invasive Phragmites in the spring or early summer. Cutting at this time of year actually encourages rhizome (root) growth.
2. Do not spray with Round Up which is not an effective control for Invasive Phragmites.
3. Do not disturb the root system. Pulling up and/or cutting the rhizomes stimulates the plant to make more of them!
4. Do not burn it. You can get rid of old debris by burning, but burning does little to control the plant since the soil does not get hot enough to destroy the rhizomes.

## **What to do:**

### **1. Cutting:**

Prior to performing any significant cutting, talk to the folks at the Code Enforcement office so they can be part of the process. (Werner Gilliam at 967-4243, ext. 104)

In late summer/early fall, after the plume-like flower spikes have appeared, cut the plant stalks down to the base. This is the time of year when the plant is sending carbohydrates (food) to the roots so cutting the foliage now robs the plant of the energy it needs to grow. Cutting at this time of year in successive seasons gradually weakens the plant.

Remove all debris and place it in black plastic bags. Take it to the Transfer Station on Sea Road in Kennebunk and put it in the general trash area. Do not put it on your compost pile or in the area for yard waste at the Transfer Station.

### **2. Spraying:**

Cutting in successive years can be as effective as spraying, so cutting should always be the first line of defense.

If the stand of Invasive Phragmites on your property is so large and well established that cutting is not possible, it can be treated in the late summer /early fall with a foliar herbicide spray formulated to treat Invasive Phragmites. Because the foliar spray will kill all foliage with which it comes in contact, it is extremely important that it be applied under ideal conditions and in strict accordance with the manufacturer's directions. We highly recommend that property owners do not attempt to apply the foliar spray themselves but instead hire a professional who is licensed in herbicide application. Here are two companies in the area who are licensed in herbicide application:

Bartlett Tree Experts (207) 967-2851

Piscataqua Tree Service (207) 439-2241

Once the foliage has died back, the debris can be cut and taken to the Transfer Station on Sea Road as outlined above.

# overview of native *Phragmites*

**Growth habit/density.** Native *Phragmites* typically occurs in low density stands often comingled with other native plants but it can occur in very dense stands more typical of the introduced form.

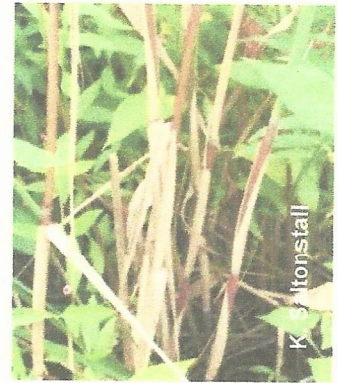
\***Leaf sheaths** fall off the culm easily once the leaf dies particularly at the lower nodes where they may no longer be present when the plant flowers.

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

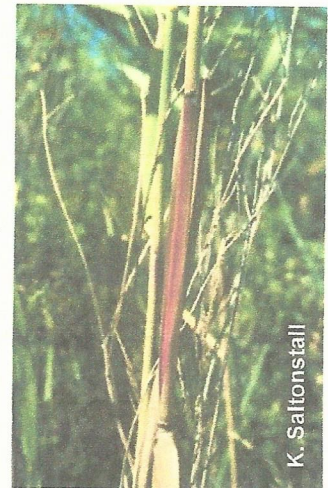
**Culms** (stems) are somewhat delicate, smooth to the touch, appear somewhat shiny and often have a red to chestnut color towards the base, particularly where the leaf sheaths have opened up or fallen away from the culm, exposing the typically enclosed culm to direct sunlight. Culms may not remain standing through the winter.

**Spots on culms** can occur and are caused by a native fungus that has not adapted to the exotic form.

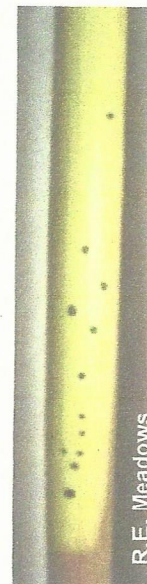
**Flowers** occur 3-4 months after spring growth is initiated; the inflorescence plumes may be sparse in comparison to the exotic forms and may not persist through the winter.



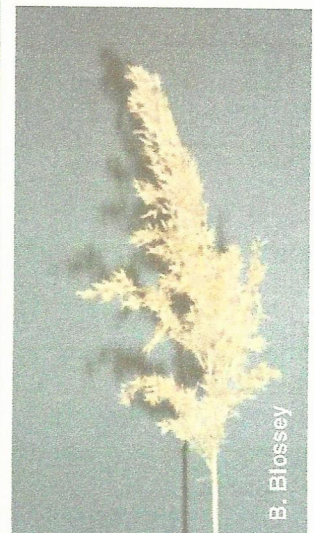
Detaching leaf sheaths



Red color on exposed internode area of culm



R.E. Meadows



B. Blotsey

# overview of introduced (invasive) *Phragmites*

**Growth habit/density.** Introduced *Phragmites* typically forms very dense stands which include both live stems and standing dead stems from the previous year's growth.

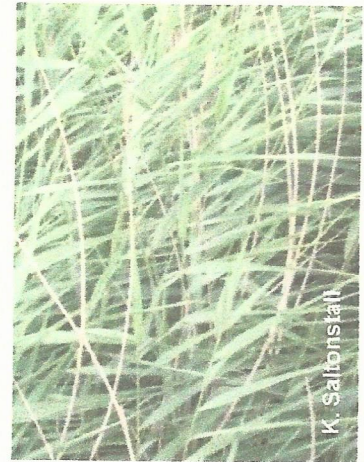
\***Leaf sheaths** adhere tightly to the culm throughout the growing season and persist on the culm as long as it remains standing.

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

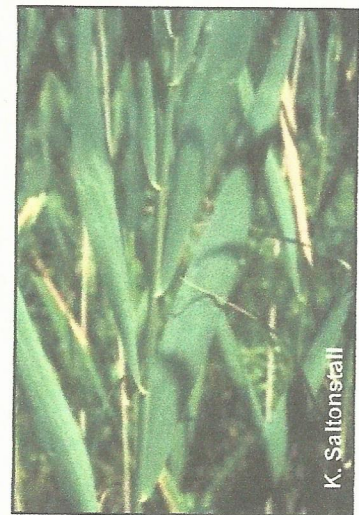
**Culms** can reach 15 feet, are very rigid, and are slightly ridged with a rougher texture than the native.

**No spots on culms.** Fungal spots are not typically present but here may be some mildew.

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



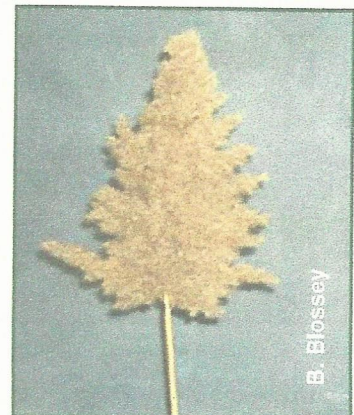
Live and dead culms form a dense monoculture



No red color at internode



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