

## COMMON REED

*Phragmites australis* (Cav.)

Trin. ex Steud.

Plant Symbol = PHAU7

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



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**Considered a noxious weed in several states.**

### Alternate Names

giant reed, giant reedgrass, Roseau, roseau cane, yellow cane, cane, *Phragmites communis*

### Uses

Although coarse, common reed is readily eaten by cattle and horses. It provides high quality warm-season forage but becomes tough and unpalatable after maturity. Animals grazing this grass during winter should be fed a protein concentrate. This plant has been used in the Southwest for lattices in constructing adobe houses.

Indians have used the stems for arrows, weaving mats, and carrying nets.

### Status

Considered a noxious weed in several states. Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

### Description

Grass Family (Poaceae). Common reed is a warm-season, rhizomatous, stoloniferous perennial, native to the U.S. The height ranges from 6 to 12 feet. The leaf blade is flat; smooth; 1/2 to 2 inches wide; and 6 to 18 inches long. The seedhead is an open panicle with a purplish or tawny and flaglike appearance after seed shatter. Common reed is readily identified by its height. It is the tallest grass in southern marshes and swamps.

### Management

This grass cannot withstand prolonged heavy grazing. Its upright growth makes it easy for livestock to remove all the leaves. For maximum production, no more than 50 percent of current year's growth by weight should be grazed off during growing season. Common reed tolerates burning if water is above soil surface. Burning is not essential for management. Water control that lowers the water level, but does not drain the area, increases production. Grazing deferrals of 60 to 90 days every 2 to 3 years during the growing season improve plant vigor.

### Establishment

Growth starts in February in some locations. Foliage stays green until frost. New shoots grow from buds at nodes of old, stems, stolons, and rhizomes. It grows in marshes and swamps, on banks of streams and lakes, and around springs. It grows best in firm mineral clays and tolerates moderate salinity. It does best if water level fluctuates from 6 inches below soil surface to 6 inches above. Common reed is often codominant with big cordgrass (*Spartina cynosuroides*) on the gulf coast marsh rangelands.

### Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Please contact your local NRCS Field Office.

### Reference

Plant Materials <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

Plant Fact Sheet/Guide Coordination Page <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/pfs.html>>

National Plant Data Center <<http://npdc.usda.gov>>

Leithead, H.L., L.L. Yarlett, & T.N. Shiflett. 1976.  
100 native forage grasses in 11 southern states.  
USDA SCS *Agriculture Handbook No. 389*,  
Washington, DC.

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Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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