

Reed Canary Grass

Phalaris arundinacea subsp. *arundinacea*



What is it and Why is it a Problem?

Reed Canary Grass is a perennial plant that quickly and aggressively invades sensitive habitats of wetlands, savannahs and wet areas. It reduces biodiversity by taking over wetlands and displacing native vegetation and nesting areas for fish and birds, and it also degrades wetlands by drawing down water levels and contributing too much biomass which can cause clogging. Finally, dense stands of Reed Canary Grass can interfere with recreational activities such as swimming, boating and fishing, as well as produce pollen which can disturb allergies.

There are many subspecies and cultivars of Reed Canary Grass which are difficult to distinguish from each other; however, the invasive subspecies can usually be easily identified by its aggressive growth and spread over native plants. In addition, native Reed Canary Grass tends to be smaller with purple tinged seedheads, whereas the invasive subspecies has larger, greenish seedheads.



What Does it Look Like?

- Leaves are flat, long, rough, sword-shaped, 0.5 - 2 cm wide and attached to stems via an open sheath (bottom of leaf that wraps around the stem)
- Stems are smooth, rigid, hollow and 1 - 2 m tall
- Roots are dense, shallow and rhizomes grow horizontally to sprout new plants
- Seed heads appear in early summer in the second year of growth, appearing first as dense, spiky and green, then dark-purple brown when they open for pollination, and finally turn straw-coloured once seeds drop



How Can it be Managed?

Prevention

- Report sightings of any invasive species online through [EDDMapS Ontario](#), a web-based mapping system which also has an app, or through the [Invasive Species in Ontario](#) project on [iNaturalist.org](#).
- Stay on the trail and keep pets on a leash to avoid unintentionally spreading the root fragments and seeds.
- Do not buy, sell or plant Invasive Reed Canary Grass. Ensure you know the difference between the native look-alikes and invasive Reed Canary Grass, and only plant native plants in your garden.



Removal

Hand pulling is recommended for small stands and must be done at least 2-3 times a year for up to 5 years. You can also choose to excavate small stands but make sure you remove all rhizomes and root masses. Mowing in the early spring (before April 1st which is when wildlife will be breeding) and late fall each year can reduce the density of the stand and allow regrowth of some native species but is not effective as a stand-alone in eradicating the plant. An option for larger, very dense stands is tarping. The infested area can be tarped with a dark-coloured tarp to reduce sunlight reaching the plant, and to “cook” the roots. This should be done after the stems have been cut back in late spring. It is most effective in areas that typically receive a lot of sunlight. Another option is burning which should only be done in April, June, or August/September and in accordance with your municipality. One last option is herbicide application, but just make sure you check the [Ontario Government's Allowable List of Pesticides](#) and follow the Ontario Pesticides Act and Ontario Regulation 63/09 and local by-laws. Keep in mind that herbicides are not recommended for use in wetland and lake areas due to difficulties that arise in protecting non-target species in aquatic ecosystems. Refer to OMNRF's [Invasive Reed Canary Grass Best Management Practices](#) for a full description on how to manage Reed Canary Grass and [OMNRF's rules](#) regarding removing invasives.

Disposal

Dispose of Reed Canary Grass by collecting the plant pieces in a black sealed bag and drying them out for a week. After this, the plant pieces can be burned (if your municipality allows) or brought to a landfill.



References

[Great Lakes Nonindigenous Species Information System](#), produced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Invasive Reed Canary Grass Best Management Practices](#), produced by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

[Methods to Control Invasive Species](#), produced by Credit Valley Conservation

[Ontario Invading Species Awareness Program](#), developed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH).



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