

Phragmites australis - Common Reed

- Graminaea - Cosmopolitan



A perennial grass with a long association with humans, the common reed is native to Eurasia and Africa but has spread all over the world with people, even though it has practically never been cultivated. It grows to a height of 3m with a spread of 1m. The stem is erect and flowering; the leaves are long, narrow, acuminate and bamboo like; the flowers are brownish, plume-like and terminal, appearing in late summer and autumn.

A truly cosmopolitan plant, it prefers moist, wet soils at lakesides or slow moving creeks, and is frost resistant but drought tender.

Propagation is by division in spring or by seed.

Phragmites australis has many uses as building and craft material - for weaving mats, as a roofing material and as a source of cellulose. All parts of the plant are edible and have been prepared in various ways. Native Americans have used this plant against digestive ailments and headaches, and the Iroquois used it to soak corn seeds in to speed germination. Medicinally the leaves and roots are renowned as a diuretic. Extracts of the rhizome have recently been found to be effective as ayahuasca analogue and the dried extract (resin) has psychoactive properties when smoked.

The rhizome and the flowers contains the alkaloids N,N-DMT, 5-MeO-DMT, bufotenine and gramine. Alkaloid content in the rhizome seems to be highest when it is grown in a submerged position.