

Reed Canarygrass

Phalaris arundinacea

Grass Family

Non-regulated Noxious Weed: Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Large, coarse perennial wetland grass that grows 3 to 9 feet tall
- Hairless stems with gradually tapering leaf blades
- Leaves are flat and have a rough texture on both sides and are at a 45-degree angle to stem
- Flower heads are found in narrow clusters on the stems high above the leaves
- Leaves are bright green (compared with the bluish-green leaves of phragmites)
- Grows mostly in wet places or along creeks and lakes

Biology

- Spreads by seeds and vegetatively by rhizomes that produce a thick mat of stems
- Frost tolerant; one of the first grasses to sprout in the spring
- Vegetative growth peaks in mid-June and declines in mid-August; goes dormant in the winter with visible dead stalks

Impacts

- Can cause indigestion or illness in livestock
- Displaces native plants due its aggressive, dense root system; wetland species diversity declines drastically
- Increases flooding
- Rhizomes accumulate sediment and clog small streams and drainages
- Dense colonies can form a physical barrier to migrating salmon

Distribution

- Very common in King County; found in wet pastures, ditches, wetlands and shorelines
- Establishes easily in wet areas with sun, but also can grow on dry soils in upland habitats in part shade (however cannot tolerate full shade)

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control
Program Line: **206-477-9333**
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds



Look for new shoots to start growing very early in the spring; seedheads (right) form May to mid-June.



Reed canarygrass spreads quickly and out-competes desirable grasses.

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling reed canarygrass, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes that this species is invasive, creating a damaging impact on the environment and resources of King County. The Board encourages control and containment of existing populations, especially for restoration projects or revegetation plans.



Removal of well-established infestations of reed canarygrass takes a lot of labor, dedication and planning.

Control Methods

Most control methods need to be applied over a number of years to be successful.

Prevention: First make sure to identify reed canarygrass correctly. There are several similar looking ornamental and pasture grasses not considered noxious and northwest native grasses that grow in the same habitat, so identification can be difficult. Watch for new patches of reed canarygrass and control them early to prevent future problems. This weed does not grow well in dense shade, so the best long-term solution is to establish a tree and shrub canopy. Evergreens work well for this as they provide year-round shade; native willows also works well. Additional control methods should be used while the shade canopy is developing.

Manual: Hand pulling or digging is only practical for small patches. Make sure to remove the entire root mass. Small infestations that are up from the shoreline (stems not underwater) can be controlled by tarping with heavy duty black plastic or non-woven geotextile fabric. However, this method will not completely eliminate the infestation, only reduce the density.

Mechanical: If the stems are not underwater and access is possible, mowing may be a viable control method as it removes seed heads. This might be enough to allow surrounding vegetation to move in, although it is unlikely to completely eliminate the reed canarygrass.

Chemical: Larger patches most likely will need herbicide treatments to be effective which will likely require a permit issued by the state Department of Ecology if the site is wet or along the water's edge. Feel free to contact us for permitting information or information on hiring a licensed aquatic weed contractor. Using an aquatic formulation of glyphosate (such as Aquamaster, Aquaneat and other products) or imazapyr (such as Habitat) will be most effective in the summer or early fall. Mowing first and allowing the reed canarygrass to grow back to a few feet tall can increase the effectiveness of herbicide spraying. Established populations will usually require at least 2 to 3 years of follow-up treatment and several herbicide applications may be necessary to inhibit seed bank recolonization.