

# Reed canary grass

(*Phalaris arundinacea*)



Photo by Wisconsin Wetland Association



Photo by UMN extension



Photo by Matt Lavin, 2007

## Key ID Features

**Leaves:** Leaf blades are flat, 1-4 feet long, up to 0.75 inches wide, smooth, and taper gradually. Ligule (where the blade and sheath come together) is transparent.

**Flowers:** The spreading flower/seed heads arise from hairless stems and can be green, purple, or brown in color and usually 3-6 inches in length. Flowering occurs from May to July.

**Fruit:** The inflorescence color changes from green to purplish to tan as the seeds mature.

**Stem:** Tall, hollow stems that are hairless and upright.

**Root:** Rhizomatous and fibrous root system which can become over 1 meter deep with lateral spread several feet per year.

**Growth Habit:** Highly competitive cool-season perennial grass, growing from creeping rhizomes and basal clumps. Forms dense monocultures blocking sun-loving plants.



Photo by minnesotawildflowers

## The Impact

Reed canary grass forms large, monotypic stands that harbor few other plant species and are little use to most native wildlife. It constricts waterways by promoting silt deposition, yet may also encourage erosion of soil beneath its dense mats in places where water flows rapidly. Overtime, it builds up a tremendous seed bank that will erupt when sites are treated for this invasive.

## Quick Facts

**Plant Family:** Poaceae

**Habitat:** Wetland margins, meadows, fields, riverbanks, shoreland, disturbed areas

**Present in Vermont?:** Yes

**Method of Spread:** Vegetative and seeds.

**Treatment methods:** Main methods include mowing/cutting, flooding, shading, repeated soil disturbance, burning, and herbicide. Integrated long term management is usually needed.

## Origin

Both Eurasian and native ecotypes [genetically distinct populations] of reed canary grass are thought to exist in the United States. Invasive populations may be descendants of non-native cultivars or ecotypes, although this is not clear. Aggressive strains have been planted throughout the United States since the 1800s for forage and erosion control. Reed canary grass has become invasive or problematic in New England and across North America.

## Native Plant Alternatives



**Bluejoint Grass**  
(*Calamagrostis canadensis*)

Stabilizes riverbanks and shorelines, provides food and shelter to birds and insects.

### SWITCHGRASS

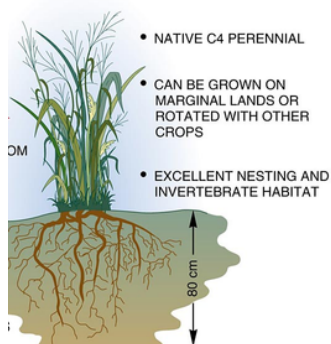


Photo by iowaswitchgrass.com

**Switchgrass**  
(*Panicum virgatum*)

Reduces erosion with deep roots and provides food and nectar for wildlife.



## Control Information

To learn more about identification & control options, check out the Gallery of Land Invasives on [VTinvasives.org](http://VTinvasives.org) and these additional resources:

[Management Guide: Recommendations for Landowners and Restoration Professionals](#)  
[IPSAWG Fact Sheet](#)

References: [UMN Extension](#), [Wisconsin wetland association](#), [USDA NRCS plant guide](#), [USFWS Case study](#)