



## Top Ten Phragmites Questions

### 1. Where did it come from?

It's believed that phragmites originated from somewhere in Eurasia, exactly where is unclear. It can be found on every continent except Antarctica.

### 2. When did it arrive in Michigan?

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as trade and shipping increased between U.S. and Europe.

### 3. How did it get to Michigan?

Ships arriving from Europe via the St. Lawrence Seaway with packaging materials and ballast contained peat and sediment that was frequently dumped in coastal marshes.

### 4. What does it look like?

Phragmites can grow up to 17 feet tall. In summer leaves are darker grey-green on alternating sides of tan and rough, dull and rigid stalks. Leaves are 2 – 2.5 inches wide and 8 – 15 inches long. Very distinguishable purple-brown plumes form at the top of the stalks by late July. In the fall the entire plant turns brown. The majority of the plant remains visible through winter including the plumes on top.



Invasive phragmites can grow to 17 feet tall.

### 5. Does it look similar to any native plants?

There is a strand of phragmites that is native to Michigan.

### 6. How do you tell the difference?

There are a few differences between native and non-native. Native stems are smooth and shiny and a noticeable red color during spring and summer and change to a light brown to grey in the fall. Non-native are tan, rough, and dull year round. The stems of native phragmites are very flexible while the non-native are very rigid. The native species also tends to coexist with native plants, not choke them out like invasive phragmites. If you're interested in more information I'd suggest:

<http://www.invasiveplants.net/phragmites/phrag/morph.htm>

### 7. Where do you find it?

Phragmites is commonly found in coastal and interior wetlands, shorelines, and roadside ditches. Phragmites also responds well in disturbed soil whether it is by natural processes like wave action on a shoreline or a human disturbance such as a construction site where soil is being disturbed.

### 8. Why is it bad?

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It creates tall, dense stands that essentially make it impossible for native vegetation to survive. The monoculture that is created crowds out animals and blocks shoreline access to swimmers, fishermen, and hunters. A dangerous fire hazard can also be produced by the dead, dry plant material left behind each fall by the plant.

**9. How does it spread so fast?**

Reproduction is primarily performed through rhizomes underground that shoot up new plants. Each rhizome can exceed 60 feet in length and can grow an additional 6 feet per year. If a rhizome is fragmented it can be transported to other areas and begin growing a new stand. The plants also produce about 2,000 seeds annually, but this is a much slower process of distribution than the rhizomes.



Phragmites rhizomes reaching across a beach.

**10. How do you get rid of it?**

It is important to properly identify phragmites before performing any removal actions. There are multiple techniques when it comes to removal. Mechanical removal is often coupled with herbicide application and has proven to work well. Prescribed burning can also be employed along with herbicide. It's important to stress that in some cases the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality requires permit(s) for the removal of invasive species. Any industrial pesticides or controlled burns must be performed by licensed individuals and must be permitted. Check with MDEQ before doing any herbicide application.

[MDEQ](http://www.mdeq.state.mi.us) has lots of information if you want more; there are links to a couple of good guides to control and management as well as more information about permits.

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