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Homeowner Questions
Answered by:
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Question: I am unable to identify a large grass that is taking over an area on my property. Would you be able to tell me the name of this grass? It grows in the swampy areas and in the area which has an extremely high water table, so it appears to like having wet feet.

Answer: The large grass that you see growing on your property is also found growing in much of our brackish and freshwater tidal wetlands. Its name is Phragmites australis, or common reed. Many homeowners enjoy watching the birds fly in and out of the clumps but it provides little value to wildlife. It is found growing in wetlands worldwide and is responsible for reducing the diversity of plant and wildlife species. Until recently the status of the plant as a native or introduced species has been in dispute, but new work has demonstrated the existence of both native and introduced genotypes of *P. australis*.

Phragmites is a tall grass that can grow up to twenty feet with a thick stalk. Its leaves are broad and gray-green during the growing season. New stems grow in the spring and the rhizomes spread horizontally throughout the growing season. It flowers in late June with bushy panicles forming seeds by August. Even though it produces a large amount of seed the viability is very low. Colonization of areas is mainly due to rhizome and stolon growth. Once established it has the ability to take over marsh communities forming dense mats and altering the hydrology and habitat as well as increasing the fire potential.

As an invasive plant it is difficult to eradicate without a continued maintenance plan or it will quickly re-infest the area. Chemical methods are recommended as an initial treatment followed by mechanical methods. Mechanical control methods should be used two weeks after chemical treatments to allow enough time for the chemical to be absorbed.

Glyphosate, approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for use in wetlands, is the broad spectrum aquatic herbicide most frequently used for control. Spraying is most effective during the summer after the seed head has formed. Treatment will cause gradual wilting, browning and deterioration of the plant. An overdose of herbicide will kill the top growth and prevent translocation to the rest of the plant. Since this is a non-selective herbicide care needs to be taken to prevent exposure to native and desired plants.

After the herbicide treatment the area should be mowed and continually mowed for a three year period. Any remaining plants will re-colonize the area within three to five years if the dead stalks are not removed.

Question shared with Press of Atlantic City – Ran August 17, 2012