

Phragmites australis

[Synonyms : *Arundo australis*, *Arundo maxima*, *Arundo occidentalis*, *Arundo phragmites*, *Cynodon phragmites*, *Oxyanthe phragmites*, *Phragmites australis* var. *berlandieri*, *Phragmites communis*, *Phragmites communis* var. *berlandieri*, *Phragmites communis* var. *flavescens*, *Phragmites communis* var. *genuina*, *Phragmites dioica*, *Phragmites flavescens*, *Phragmites karka*, *Phragmites maxima*, *Phragmites phragmites*, *Phragmites vulgaris*, *Trichoon phragmites*, *Zizania effusa*]

COMMON REED is an invasive deciduous grass. Native to Europe and to the Americas it has initially reddish, then silvery purplish-grey maturing to brown spikelets.

It is also known as *Bayongbong* (Sundanese), *Bladvass* (Swedish), Carrizo, Common reedgrass, *Corsen* (Welsh), Danube grass, *Fragmito aŭstrala* (Esperanto), *Gemeines Schilf* (German), Giant reed, *Glagah asu* (Javanese), *Järviruoko* (Finnish), Norfolk reed, Pampas grass, *Qasab* (Arabic), *Qasbiet ir-rih* (Maltese), *Rákos obecný* (Czech), Reed, Reed grass, *Riet* (Dutch), River cane, *Rôs* (Channel Islander-Guernsey and Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Roseau* (French), *Roseau á balai* (French), *Rumput gedabong* (Malay), *Schilf* (German), *Schilfrohr* (German), *Tambo* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Trostnik obykovennyj* (Russian), *Trst' obyčajná* (Slovak), *Trzcina pospolita* (Polish), *Vass* (Swedish), and Wild broomcorn; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of authority, blessedness (single reed), complacency (single reed), 'confidence in heaven' (flowering), folly (split reed), frailty, indiscretion (split reed), instability, literature, marsh, music (bundle with flower heads, i.e. panicles), and writing (single reed).

Any leaves submerged by flooding will die off, thus leaf height can be a useful indication of water level .

Australis means 'southern, or of or from the Southern hemisphere' .

According to Greek mythology the fire Prometheus stole for man from the forges of Hephaestus on the island of Lemnos was carried to mankind in a hollow reed. And Pan as consolation for losing the nymph Syrinx (when she was transformed into a reed to evade him) fashioned his flute out of reeds and christened it Syrinx, or Pan-pipes.

The common reed is a Christian symbol for humility and justice.

Authorities suggest that *Bible* references to Jonathan's arrows (mentioned in the First Book of Samuel) and John's pen (referred to in his Third Epistle in the New Testament) have reeds in common as they were used to make both artefacts. The ancient Greeks and the Romans also made pens from reeds, and used a penknife to cut a point that was then split so that the ink would flow (as quill pens are still cut today). The stems were also used in ancient Egypt and in India to make pens.

Reeds (the stems) have been a traditional thatching material for roofing since earliest times and they have also been used for basketmaking and matting. The stems have been plaited into sandals in northern India and in other areas they have been used to make coarse hats. In the 20th Century it has been harvested for processing into cellulose and paper.

In some areas such as the Philippines the plumes of flower spikes have been bound together for use as brooms.

The flower plumes have also been used in dry flower arrangements.

Familiar to many of the North American Indian tribes, common reed was of particular significance to the south-western Hopi Indians as they believed their ancestors reached the earth's surface from the Underworld by climbing up through the reed's stems. Although the stems were associated in relatively recent Hopi ceremonial with bows and arrows researchers have found little evidence of their active use as shafts for arrows destined for large targets – although reports were made of their use by the Hualapai, Kawaiisu, Klamath, some of the Apache, Havasupai, Tewa, some of the Paiute, the Montana Indian and Navajo tribes and it is likely that this would have been for say small birds. Iroquois Indians also used common reed as one of their ritual medicines.

Authorities have noted that common reed was also a source of food for some North American Indian tribes including the Yuma. Both the Montana Indian, and Klamath tribes are believed to have eaten the seeds – and the Paiute and also the Kawaiisu used the stem sap as a sweetener.

Records show that in the absence of any practicable alternative the Thompson Indians used the grass as forage for their animals.

The common reed has been used to make prayer sticks (those of the Navajo were of highly intricate design) and pipe stems or cigarette casings (tobacco was smoked conveniently this way by the Maricopa, Montana Indian, Cocopa, some of the Apache, Yuma, Kawaiisu, some of the Tohono O'Odham and the Havasupai). Stems provided roofing material for the Hopi Indians. The larger stems were used by the Middle American Seri Indian tribe for building rafts. North American Havasupai Indians, some of the Okanagan-Colville, the Thompson, some of the Tohono O'Odham and the Chippewa tribes also wove the stems into mats or frames for drying berries and larger fruit, or fruit pulp. Various tribes including the Thompson, Klamath, some of the Okanagan-Colville and the Montana Indian tribe used the plant for basketry, not least to form decorative patterns. Both the Thompson tribe and some of the Okanagan-Colville used part of the plant extensively for making the fringes on their dresses – and authorities have noted that the Seminole Indians used stems as medicine tubes through which they could direct a prescription with greater ease and accuracy (a tool that must have been especially helpful for handling babies and young children).

Reed flutes were made by the Hualapai and some of the Tohono O'Odham, as well as the Cahuilla tribe (among whom they were usually played by men), and the Kawaiisu Indians used the reeds to play their musical bow. The stems provided game sticks for the Tewa tribe, and the Kawaiisu also used pieces of stem for their dice games.

North American Indian tribes included the plant among their medicinal resources. It was part of treatment given to Paiute patients suffering from pneumonia, and it was prescribed by the Keresan (for their children), and some of the Apache tribe for treating diarrhoea. The latter also used the root for some stomach upsets. The plant provided splint material for setting broken bones in the Cahuilla tribe, Blackfoot Indians used a plant decoction to cause vomiting and the Seminole tribe applied a plant poultice to boils.

Very young shoots have been eaten as a vegetable in China.

Not only are the runners in the root network nutritious but the young shoots have also been used as fodder.

It seems that common reed is valuable in an environmental capacity. In North America authorities note that it is abundant in dense stands on the Hackensack Meadows of New Jersey where it acts as a filter for the polluted air emanating from metropolitan areas of both New Jersey and New York. In some regions it has also been used in flood control and the root networks are often sited to help prevent erosion.

The stems are still used today for thatching.

Medicinally, the roots have been used to treat arthritis, jaundice, stomach upsets and food poisoning. The young shoots have also been used in Chinese medicine dating back to at least 500.

A single reed is the birthday flower for 17th October.

A split reed is the plant for 6th October.