Reed canarygrass
Phalaris arundinacea

ALSO KNOWN AS:
Ornamental reed canary grass, gardener’s garters, ribbon grass.

DESCRIPTION:
Reed canarygrass is an upright, rhizomatous reed that grows up to 6 feet (2 meters) tall.

LIFE CYCLE:
Perennial.
Above-ground vegetation dies back in the late fall and resprouts from underground rhizomes in the early spring.

LEAF AND STEM:
Its hairless leaf blades are flat, smooth, and light green. They are 4-14 inches (10-35 centimeters) long. Ligules, the junction of a leave and a leafstalk, have a thin membrane and are 4-10 millimeters long. One variety (Phalaris arundinacea var. picta) has variegated leaves.
Stems are hollow, unbranched, and up to 0.5 inch (1.3 centimeters) wide.

FLOWER AND SEEDS (OR FRUIT):
Flowers bloom from June through July. Flower clusters, known as panicles, grow 2-7 inches (5-18 centimeters) long at the end of stems above the leaves. Seeds are light brown and 2-3 millimeters long.

REPORT:
Reed canarygrass is widespread throughout Washington County and does not need to be reported.

STATE OF OREGON:
Class B (Phalaris arundinacea var. picta)

STATE OF WASHINGTON:
Class C

FOUR-COUNTY CWMA (Regional):
Class C
BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES CONT.

Reed canarygrass
*Phalaris arundinacea*

**DISTRIBUTION:**
In Washington County, reed canarygrass is widespread and commonly produces monocultures in wetland and riparian areas.

**HABITAT:**
Reed canarygrass grows in saturated to mostly saturated soils for most of the growing season. Established stands can tolerate extended periods of inundation.

It grows well in sunny areas and does not tolerate shady areas. Roadsides, ditches, wet pastures, open wetlands, and sunny stream margins are common habitats for reed canarygrass.

**NATIVE RANGE AND HOW IT ARRIVED HERE:**
There is a lot of debate over whether reed canarygrass is native to the Pacific Northwest. However, populations are possibly expanding due to the introduction of European cultivars for hay and livestock forage.

**HOW IT SPREADS:**
Seeds are distributed along waterways by animals, humans, and flowing water.

Reed canarygrass produces aggressive underground rhizomes which sprout new stems. Stems are also capable of growing new shoots from the nodes.

**WHAT IT THREATENS:**
Reed canarygrass forms dense stands due to its aggressive rhizomes and vigorous growth. These monocultures outcompete native plants for resources.

Stands are of little value to wildlife and render wetlands unusable by waterfowl due to the density of the growth. Infestations increase siltation in irrigation banks and ditches.

**LOOK-ALIKES:**
Native blue wildrye is often confused with reed canarygrass due to its tall flowering stalks and rhizomatous growth. Blue wildrye’s ligules are shorter than reed canarygrass’ and its flowers are larger and more branched.
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**HOW CAN YOU CONTROL IT:**

Reed canarygrass is extremely difficult to eradicate due to its dense growth and vigorous rhizomes. Large infestations require multiple control strategies and several years of treatment.

**CULTURAL:**

Grazing is not practical in wetland areas and does not kill the underground rhizomes. Planting native species that provide shade, such as Pacific willow (*Salix lucida*) or red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), will help suppress reed canarygrass. Plantings must be maintained for several years to allow them to grow to an adequate size to provide shade. Carefully mowing the reed canarygrass around the plantings will assist in their establishment.

**MECHANICAL:**

Repeated mowing can help native plants become established. However, it will not completely eradicate a reed canarygrass infestation unless used in combination with other strategies. Small patches can be dug up using a shovel. Be careful to remove all the roots to prevent resprouts. Place all plant material in a tied plastic bag and throw it away in the trash - not the yard debris. Monitor the area for several seasons to prevent plants from regrowing.

**BIOLOGICAL:**

Currently, there are no approved biological control agents for reed canarygrass.

**CHEMICAL:**

For specific herbicide information, please contact the Tualatin SWCD Invasive Species Program at invasives@tualatinswcd.org.

Tualatin SWCD does not endorse the use of specific herbicide brands or products. Consult the label for accurate application rates and appropriate sites to use on before every application.