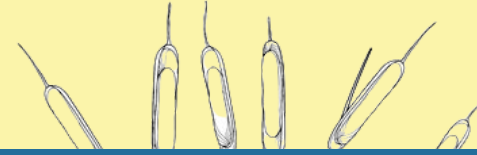




BROADLEAF CATTAIL

Typha latifolia

Also called Bulrush, Common Bulrush, and Common Cattail



Broad-leaved cattail is native to New England, where it is found in wet soils and shallow water. With an enormous capacity for growth, it can aggressively colonize areas of human disturbance. Known as “the supermarket of the swamp,” all parts of the plant have been widely used by Native Americans for medicine, food and crafts.

Habitat Preference

Mostly freshwater and slightly brackish marshes. Rich, hydric soils. High mud and saline tolerance.

Characteristics:

Vegetative

- Long, linear, parallel, flat and sheathing leaves with broad linear leaf blades that can be up to 5 feet tall. Alternately arranged. Some leaf attachment points are above the midpoint of the stem.

Flower

- Two sets of minute flowers densely packed into brown, cylindrical inflorescence.

Fruit/Seed

- Seeds disperse when fruit comes in contact with water, opening the pericarp and releasing the seeds.

Other Key Identifiers:

- Grows in dense, grassy mats; cattails reach a usual height of seven feet; stems are tall, erect, and unbranched.





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Cultural History Notes

Native Americans and early European settlers used cattails as a food source, as construction material, and as a medicine.

- **Food:** All parts of the cattail are edible when harvested at the right time. It can be ground into flour or cooked as vegetables (roots and young shoots eaten raw or cooked).
- **Materials:** used as bedding, thatching and matting; used in manufacture of baskets, boats, rafts, shoes, ropes, and paper.
- **Medicine:** wound dressing for burns and scalds, roots made into medicine to dissolve kidney stones/painful menstruation/ postpartum pains, flower heads eaten as treatment for diarrhea and other body pain.

Ecological Contributions to Lake Champlain

Biological:

- Shoots and rhizomes (underground stems) are consumed by muskrats and water fowl.

Chemical:

- Roots can break down heavy metals.

Physical:

- Provides nesting sites for red-winged blackbirds, ducks, geese and fish as well as use by deer for hiding cover. High capacity for growth—single seed can produce a network of rhizomes and a hundred shoots in one growing season.

Similar Species

Narrowleaf Cattail (*Typha angustifolia*)

- Non-native species to the U.S. but has not shown invasive characteristics.
- Known to hybridize with broadleaf cattail.

How to differentiate broadleaf and narrowleaf cattails:

Leaves:

- Broadleaf: 14-23 millimeters wide, shorter than flower spike.
- Narrowleaf: 4-10 millimeters wide, taller than flower spike.
- Hybrid: variable width and height.

Stems:

- Broadleaf: 1 - 3 meters, stout in form
- Narrowleaf: 1 - 3 meters, weak in form
- Hybrid: 2 - 3 meters, stout in form

Flowers/Fruit:

- Broadleaf: male and female portions of spike typically together, spike less than 6 inches.
- Narrowleaf: male and female portions of the spike separated by 2-4 centimeter gap, spike less than 6 inches.
- Hybrid: male and female portions typically separated by 2-4 centimeter gap; spike 6 inches or longer.



BROADLEAF CATTAIL

Photo from Vermont Dept. of Environmental Conservation



NARROWLEAF CATTAIL

Photo from Wikimedia Commons

Scan to learn more about Lake Champlain's native aquatic plants!



The Lake Champlain Committee is a watershed-based nonprofit that uses science-based advocacy, education, and collaborative action to protect and restore water quality, safeguard natural habitats and ensure recreational access in the Lake Champlain Basin.



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