

IMPORTANT HARVESTING TIP:
You are what you eat, and cattails are the water they grow in. Cattails are so effective at pulling in minerals and other compounds from their surrounding water, that they've been used in bioremediation to clean water contaminated with heavy metals and other poisonous substances. So if you're going to try harvesting cattails, make sure they're growing in **CLEAN** water.

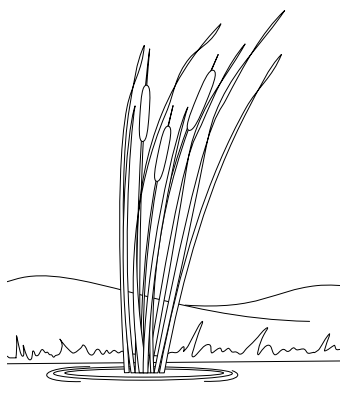
SCIENCE MOM
— JENNYBALLIF.COM —

The male or staminate flowers are first to emerge, followed soon by the female or pistillate flowers. These tiny flowers don't have petals or sepals and are packed together tightly. During late summer to autumn, the seeds are released with tufts of long hair (down). One cattail blossom can produce more than 250,000 seeds. In the common cattail (*Typha latifolia*) the male and female flowers are joined together. In the narrow leaved cattail (*Typha angustifolia*) and southern cattail (*Typha domingensis*), the male and female flowers are separated by a narrow portion of stem.

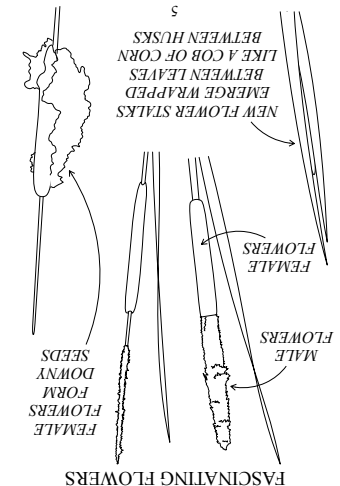
AWESOME **ADAPTATION**
FOR GROWING IN WATER

Cattails often grow in several inches of standing water, with their roots entirely submerged in. Plant roots need oxygen to survive, without it they die. So how do cattails grow in water that is stagnant and very low in oxygen? They build tubes of spongy tissue called aerenchyma in their leaves and stems that allow oxygen to travel to the roots. Cattails build such an effective system of aerenchyma, that even dead brown leaves are able to transport oxygen to the roots.

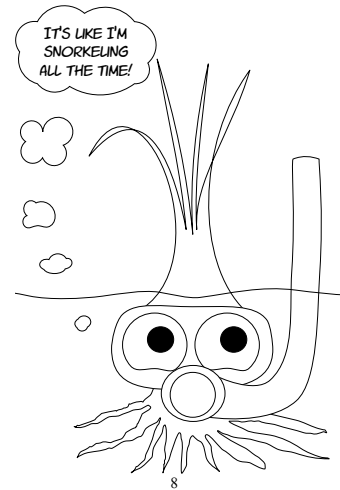
The next time you walk near a marshy area, stop and look for cattails: one of the most useful and edible wild plants. Take a moment to investigate the flowers, rubbing the downy fluff from last year's seeds and checking the stalks for signs of this year's growth. Imagine an ancient tribe of people, whether Native American, or early European, coming to the harvest the cattails for building materials, clothing, tinder, and food. The cattail continues to play an important role in our wetlands.



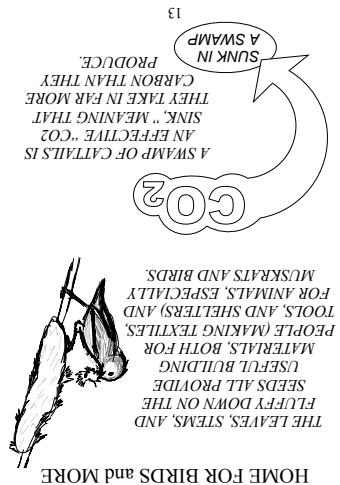
Cattails
A pocket-sized field guide



FASCINATING FLOWERS
MALE FLOWERS
FEMALE FLOWERS
SEEDS
FLOWERS WRAPPED BETWEEN LEAVES
NEW FLOWER STALKS
BETWEEN HUSKS
LIKE A COB OF CORN



IT'S LIKE I'M SNORKELING ALL THE TIME!

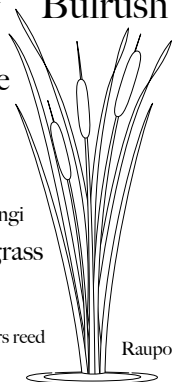


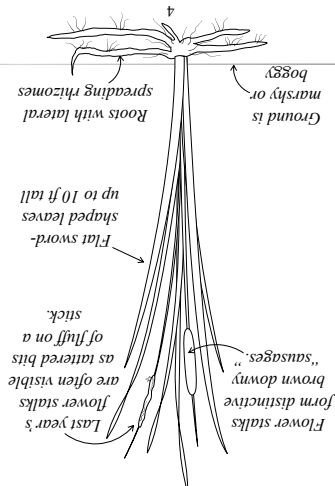
HOME FOR BIRDS AND MORE
THE LEAVES, STEMS, AND FLUFFY DOWN ON THE SEEDS ALL PROVIDE USEFUL BUILDING MATERIALS, BOTH FOR PEOPLE (MAKING TEXTILES, TOOLS, AND SHELTERS) AND FOR ANIMALS, ESPECIALLY MUSKRATS AND BIRDS.
A SWAMP OF CATTAILS IS AN EFFECTIVE "CO₂ SINK," MEANING THAT THEY TAKE IN FAR MORE CARBON THAN THEY SUCK IN PRODUCE.
SUNK IN A SWAMP

ONE GENUS, MANY NAMES

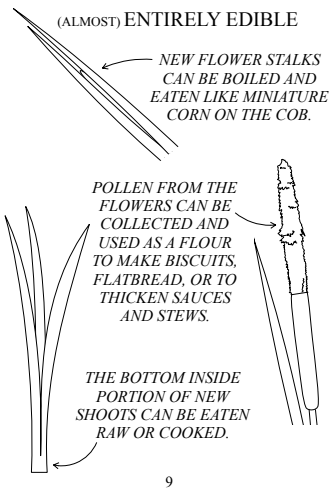
Cattail **Bulrush**

Water sausage
Punks
Cat's tail
Cumbungi
Corn dog grass
Cat'o'nine tails
Coopers reed
Reedmace
Raupo

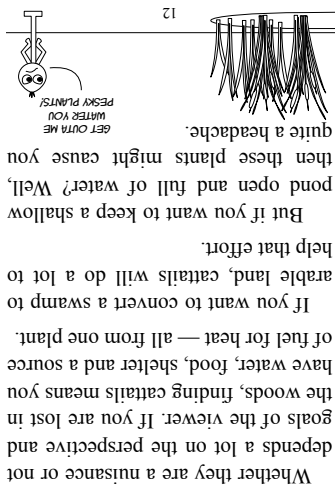




Flat sword-shaped leaves up to 10 ft tall
Roots with lateral spreading rhizomes
Ground is marshy or boggy
Last year's flower stalks are often visible as lathered bits of fluff on a stick
'sausages,' form distinctive brown downy flower stalks



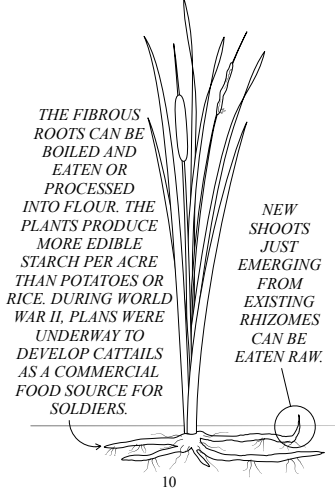
(ALMOST) ENTIRELY EDIBLE
NEW FLOWER STALKS CAN BE BOILED AND EATEN LIKE MINIATURE CORN ON THE COB.
POLLEN FROM THE FLOWERS CAN BE COLLECTED AND USED AS A FLOUR TO MAKE BISCUITS, FLATBREAD, OR TO THICKEN SAUCES AND STEWS.
THE BOTTOM INSIDE PORTION OF NEW SHOOTS CAN BE EATEN RAW OR COOKED.



GET OUTTA ME
PESH PLANTS! WATER YOU
quite a headache.

Whether you're looking at Narrow-leaved cattails, common cattails, or some hybrid between the two, these plants are some of the most useful and edible botanicals you'll ever find. Humans have found multiple uses for every part of the cattail. They've eaten the roots, pollen, shoots, and flower stalks, and made boats, clothing, beds, paper, and rope, all from this one plant. Cattails grow throughout the world, always in wetlands or marshy areas. Known by a variety of common names, they are all species of one genus: *Typha*.

IDENTIFICATION
Cattails are easy to identify when flowering. Their cylindrical flowers are unique, and look much like a sausage on a stick. While the mature plants are easy to recognize, the young shoots can be confused with poisonous members of the Iris family such as Western Blue Flag. Cattails are an oblique wetland plant, meaning they grow exclusively in wetlands and flooded areas. They can tolerate a wide variety of climates, from tropical to temperate, but cannot survive prolonged periods of drought.



NEW SHOOTS JUST EMERGING FROM EXISTING RHIZOMES CAN BE EATEN RAW.
THE FIBROUS ROOTS CAN BE BOILED AND EATEN OR PROCESSED INTO FLOUR. THE PLANTS PRODUCE MORE EDIBLE STARCH PER ACRE THAN POTATOES OR RICE. DURING WORLD WAR II, PLANS WERE UNDERWAY TO DEVELOP CATTAILS AS A COMMERCIAL FOOD SOURCE FOR SOLDIERS.

TREASURE OR PEST?
While native to the Americas, Asia, Australia and Europe, cattails have been introduced to many tropical islands, where they are considered an invasive species. Even in areas where they are native, they are sometimes viewed as a problem plant because of how efficiently and quickly they can overtake a wetland area. They spread both from underground rhizomes and from seeds. Within a few months, cattails can fill in a shallow pond or canal so that the water is no longer accessible.

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