



Field Horsetail

Equisetum arvense L.

Field horsetails belong to a very small group of plants, the horsetails and scouring rushes (genus *Equisetum*) that are utterly different from any other plants on Earth. These plants grow with peculiar jointed stems, and the remnant leaves look like small scales ringing the stems at the joints. Like ferns, they reproduce by spores. An argument has been raging for years now as to whether they should be considered part of the ferns or entirely separate. The surviving plants are only a tiny portion of the numbers of species that once dominated much of the earth, growing to tree size and constituting entire forests.

The field horsetail is one of two that is native to much of the eastern United States. The other is the scouring rush, *Equisetum hyemale* variety affine. However, there are only

15 or 16 species of this genus in the entire world today, and 9 of them are native to northern North America – southeast Ohio is just not far enough north.

The field horsetail is beautiful when allowed to spread through a garden bed, very finely-textured and delicate-appearing and looking almost like a pine tree seedling. However, looks can be deceiving – if this plant is not contained, it can take over. It must be contained by deep borders, foundations, or by mowing. It typically is about eight inches to fifteen inches in height, and it is possible to grow other plants mixed in with them if the other plants are not too short.

The field horsetail is easy to grow and will tolerate most soils. It is not good at weathering extreme drought, however, and loves moisture. It also dislikes deep shade. It is happiest growing in wet ground in the sun.



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