



## **TYPHA - CATTAIL**

*By Rosie Coble*

I spent much of my childhood in fairly rural surroundings, in a very flat part of Eastern England called the Broad (marshes), where inland waterways wandered across the County, and cattails, or bulrushes as they were known, lined both sides of the water like thick, green curtains. I still remember the sight and sound of them swaying in the breeze. The brown catkins resembled sausages on sticks—little did I know that many parts of the plant are actually edible! Native to many parts of the world, including the UK and North America, *Typha* is a Genus with about 10 species, only some of which are suitable for a garden pond.

The foliage is long, narrow, and sedge-like in that it is flat on one side (sedges have edges), 1/2" to 2" wide and from 6" to 12 feet tall, depending on the species. The flowers are the long catkins that turn brown as they mature, usually by June, and this is where the thousands of tiny, fluffy seeds form. As they dry out they are released on the wind (I called them fairies!) Birds snap the seed fluff up to line their nests. Although seed is one way they spread, it's more efficient to divide the rhizomes in spring.

Visually stunning in masses, cattails come into their own in the winter landscape when they stand stark against the snow. In the wild they are habitat for many insects, birds and amphibians— in the Broad they were home to the coypu, which is a cross between a rat and a beaver. They have many beneficial uses as prevention of soil erosion, land reclamation projects, and food sources. The Native Americans were pretty smart— not only did they eat the roots, new shoots, and baby catkins, they used the seed fluff as tinder for lighting fires.

### **Here are the 5 most used cattails:**

***Typha latifolia*** - common cattail. Found in wetlands and ditches, good for larger, natural looking ponds, or bog garden. Plant in moist soil, or water to 12" deep. Grows to 7-8 feet .

**Typha latifolia 'Variegata'** - variegated cattail. Boasts bold green and white longitudinally striped foliage. Difficult to transplant, but worth the effort. Grows 5-6 feet, in bog or water to 12" deep.

**Typha angustifolia**- graceful cattail. More narrow leaved ,arching elegantly, with thinner catkins Grows 4-6 feet,moist soil or water to 12". Great looking in pond or large container.

**Typha laxmanni**- dwarf cattail. Narrow foliage, small catkins, grows only to 3 feet. Good for smaller ponds or container water garden .May need more shade as not heat tolerant. Plant in water to 4" deep.

**Typha minima**- miniature cattail. Great for small ponds or container garden, as this one has petite, round catkins on very small plants-only 12"-18". The foliage is blue/green. Plant in 3" water.

**Care:** Pretty care free once planted, but it is advisable to plant within a large metal container, sunk into the bog or amongst large rocks, as they can be very invasive. Remember to cut the plants down to a couple of inches in late winter, as you don't want the new growth to have a 'Flat top' hairdo!