

Horsetail - Scouring Rush

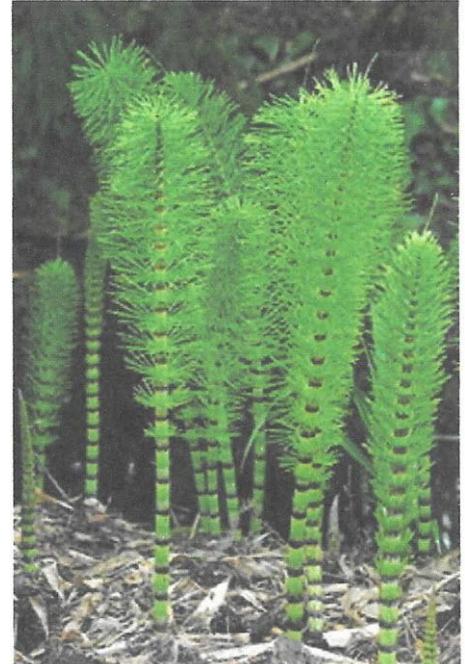
Genus: *Equisetum*

Latin *equus* ("horse") + *seta* ("bristle")

Order: Equisetales

Family: Equisetaceae

Genus: ***Equisetum***



Equisetum, an herbaceous perennial, is a survivor genus of the Devonian Era of 235 million years ago. *Equisetum* (species now extinct) reached heights of more than 30 meters (100 feet). The tallest of the existing horsetails are the giant horsetail (*Equisetum giganteum*) and the Mexican giant horsetail (*Equisetum myriochaetum*) topping 16 feet and 24 feet respectively. There is only one tree like species and is a native of the American tropics growing to 30 feet. There is only one genera consisting of 23 species worldwide.

Horsetail spreads by rhizomes that can grow as deep as 6 feet. Horsetail is a relative of ferns and reproduces by spores produced from a cone like structure (stobilus) growing on top of the plant. Spores are wrapped with small bands that unwrap in dry weather to act as parachutes to be carried in the wind. *Equisetum* consists of 2 types of stems of both reproductive non-photosynthetic and non-reproductive non-photosynthetic. You will find most species in wet areas while some species are suited for dry poor soils.

Uses

- *Equisetum arvense* was used by Native Americans, Romans and Chinese physicians to treat ailments.
- Used in dying yarn. Layer wool or yarn with horsetail (10:1 horsetail to yarn); boil for 30 min. then dry in the shade. Yarn or wool can then be redyed with other plants. Colors are improved with first dying with horsetail.
- Known for their biominerallisation of silica dioxide, earning the plant the common name of "scouring rush." The green stems can be used to scrub pots or it is also used to scour reeds for wind instruments.
- Because of the silica content horsetail is used for eye treatment and skin disorders. Can also be taken internally to relieve painful or difficult urination, stomach bleeding, or intestinal track.

- Sterile stems can be dried, ground to a power for thickening or to make mush. Also used to make tea (sold in grocery stores). Sterile plants can be used to make an infusion effective in combating offensive odor.
- Leaves and stems can be steamed for nasal congestion or cold.
- Root tubercles can be eaten raw. Romans ate *arvense* like asparagus or make tea.
- Plant decoction was used as a contraceptive, to initiate abortion, to stimulate menstruation and to relieve bladder problems
- Stems bruised were used as a poultice for treating blood poisoning and to stop the swelling of eye lids.
- Ash of the stems of horsetails (*Equisetum sps.*) was used alone or with grease as a poultice on burns or sores.
- Roots were heated and placed against aching teeth.
- Sterile stalks were used as an astringent to stop the spitting of blood.
- A decoction of the stalks is said to be calcium rich and were once considered beneficial as a hair wash or if taken as a tonic good for fingernails and teeth.
- Underground stems and roots are food to some native groups who classify them as berries. They are collected in the spring by the water and are sweet and juicy then, much relished as the first fruit of the season. They are eaten raw, with or without lard and are sometimes put in Indian ice-cream.
- Fertile sterns bearing strobili of some species are cooked and eaten like asparagus (a dish called *tsukushi*) in Japan.
- Can be poisonous to animals including horses. Toxicity appears to be due to thiaminase causing vitamin B deficiency.

<http://www.indefenseofplants.com/blog/2015/5/21/ancient-equisetum>

http://uejeps.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/get_cpn.pl?EQUIS

<https://www.texasnaturalsupply.com/Horsetail-Extract-Water-Based-p/hrtw-px.htm>

[www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/equisetum arvense.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/equisetum_arvense.shtml)

<https://www.flora.dempstercountry.org/II.3.Equisetaceae/Equisetaceae.html>

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