



Indian Spring Herbal Encyclopedia

A complete guide for learning about the medicinal herbs and wild foods that Mother Nature has to offer.

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Medicinal Herbs

Cattails (*typha spp.*)

An erect, semi-aquatic or aquatic, perennial herb of the cattail family (Typhaceae). The leaves are basal, erect, swordlike, flat; 1/3 - 3/4 inch wide and

3 to 10 feet tall; 12 to 16 leaves arising from each vegetative shoot.

The stems

are unbranched, stiff, erect and 5 to 10 feet tall. The stems are topped by compact, cylindrical heads of minute flowers. The flower structure is a dense, dark brown, cylindrical spike on the end of the stem. The rhizomes are stout, usually 1/4 to 1-1/4 inches in diameter and up to 27 inches in length. The fruit is a tiny, tufted nutlet and the seeds are minute and numerous.



Common
Cattail

(*Typha
latifolia*)

The leaves are broader and its fruiting spikes showing no separation between the male and female sections. Found in shallow water.



Narrow-Leaved
Cattail

(*Typha
angustifolia*)

The leaves are narrower and there is a gap between the male and female flowerheads.

Found in deep water.

SowHabitat: Almost anywhere soil remains wet, saturated, or flooded most of the growing season. This includes wet meadows, marshes, pond and lake margins, floating bog mats, seacoast estuaries, roadside ditches, irrigation canals, and backwater areas of rivers and streams. Generally restricted to areas where the water depth never exceeds about 2-1/2 feet.

Nearly worldwide; in North America, Central America, Great Britain, Eurasia, Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and Japan.

In North America and northwest Canada to Newfoundland, and south through every province, territory, and state to Mexico and Guatemala.

Flowers: May - June

Parts Used: Young shoots and stalks, immature flower spikes, pollen, sprouts, and rootstock.

Harvest: All year.

Uses: Salad, cooked vegetable, flour, pickle, and potato. The cattail is one of the best and most versatile of our native wild foods. In early spring the young shoots, which are easily pulled from the rootstocks, can be peeled to a tender white core and eaten raw as you would celery or in a salad or sliced and sautéed in butter. When the shoot is about 2 feet high, the core becomes tough and fibrous.

In early summer you can take young pollen spikes at the top of the stalk, and boil them in salted water for 20 minutes. Put butter on them and eat like corn on the cob. In late summer, the same pollen spike will fluff up as it ripens. Large amounts of pollen can be gathered by shaking the heads in an open bag. After it is sifted through a strainer, the pollen makes an excellent protein-rich flour when mixed half-and-half with wheat flour. Be sure to dry the pollen thoroughly before storing for future use.

In late summer, small horn-shaped sprouts form at the tip of the long rootstocks, and remain through winter. These can be added to salads, or boiled for 10 minutes and served with butter. In earliest spring as they begin to extend, but before they break through the surface of the mud, these sprouts can be peeled, boiled briefly, and pickled in hot vinegar. In addition, the starchy core at the base of each sprout can be prepared like a potato.

In late fall, winter, or earliest spring, the shallowly buried rootstocks become well filled with starch. To make a good quality white flour, wash the rootstocks thoroughly, peel off the outer covering to reveal the starchy core, and crush the core in a pail of cold water, separating the starch from the fibers. Remove the fibers, allow the starch to settle, and pour off the water. When this washing process has been repeated once or twice more, you will have pure white flour that can be used immediately, or dried for later use.

Cattail Casserole

1 egg	1 cup freshly grated cheddar
Salt & pepper to taste	cheese (or your favorite)
3 cups steamed, immature	1/2 cup milk
cattail flower spikes	1 cup soft bread crumbs
1/4 tsp nutmeg	

Gather the flower spikes in the spring while they are tender and green, before the yellow pollen begins to show on the outside of the spikes.

Beat egg; add salt, pepper, cattail flower spikes, nutmeg, milk and bread crumbs. Put a layer of this mixture into a well greased shallow casserole dish; sprinkle with cheese; add another layer of cattail mixture, then another layer of cheese, and so forth until you run out. Top with grated cheese and bake at 350°F for 35 to 45 minutes or until set and browned lightly on top.

Cattail Cornbread

1 Tbsp honey	1/2 cup cattail pollen
1 Tbsp margarine	1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup milk	3/4 cup yellow corn meal
1 egg	2 tsp baking powder
1/4 tsp salt	

Mix honey and margarine together. Mix remaining ingredients in their given order. Pour into a well-greased pan. Bake at 425°F for 25 minutes.

Cattail GriddleCakes

3/4 cup cattail pollen
1-1/4 cups self-rising flour
1 egg, beaten

1 cup milk
1 tablespoon sugar

Combine the cattail pollen and self-rising flour. Add the egg, milk, and sugar and beat until smooth. Drop onto a hot griddle, using 1/2 cup of batter for each cake. When the first side is brown and bubbly, turn and brown the other side.

Makes 8 griddle cakes.

Cattail On The Cob

24 immature cattail flower spikes
Butter or margarine
Salt

Gather the flower spikes in the spring while they are tender and green, before the yellow pollen begins to show on the outside of the spikes.

Remove the husk as you would sweet corn. Boil. Remove from the water and rub with butter or margarine and add salt. Eat as you would corn on the cob.

If you are using narrow-leaved cattails (*Typha angustifolia*), you will notice a different taste between the male flowers and the female flowers.

Sauteed Cattail Shoots

This makes a nice springtime dish!

Sauté together: Cattail shoots, stinging nettle, violet leaves, violet flowers, dandelions and wild leeks. (Or use other combinations with some of your favorite wild plants.)



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