

**SOFTSTEM
BULRUSH**
*Schoenoplectus
tabernaemontani* (K.C. Gmel.)
Palla
plant symbol = SCTA2

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center



Robert Mohlenbrock
USDA, NRCS, Wetland Sciences Institute
@ PLANTS

Alternative Names

great bulrush, soft-stemmed bulrush, common bulrush, giant bulrush, bull whip, *Scirpus validus* (SCVA)

Uses

Ethnobotanic: Native Americans wove the stems of softstem bulrush into mats (Guard 1995). The dried beaten rootstocks were used by some Indian tribes as meal for bread, while the young tip of the rootstock was edible and reputed to serve as a thirst-quencher;

the boiled young roots yield sweet syrup (Steyermark 1963).

Wildlife: *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* provide food and cover for fish, muskrats, raccoons, and otters (Guard 1995). The hard-coated fruits are an important and common food source for ducks, shore birds, and marsh birds (Ibid.). This species provide nesting cover for water birds, waterfowl, and marsh wrens.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description

General: Sedge family (Cyperaceae). Soft-stem bulrush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* is a tall, perennial, herbaceous plant that grows up to ten feet tall. The leaves are highly modified into long sheaths that closely girdle stem bases (Guard 1995). The flowers are borne in an open inflorescence of many stalked, budlike spikelets, covered by reddish brown scales below the top of the stem (Tiner 1987). The fruit is a brownish gray achene (Ibid.).

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Adaptation

Soft-stem bulrush occurs in deep or shallow water, or in muddy or marshy ground around lakes, ponds, streams, and wooded wetlands (Guard 1995). This species usually occurs in poorly drained soil. It grows better in saline conditions than in fresh water, and it tolerates a wide range of salinity.

Establishment

Propagation by Seed: *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* seeds should be sown in a cold frame as soon as they are ripe in a pot standing in three centimeters of water. The seeds germinate quickly. When they are large enough to handle, large divisions can be planted directly into their permanent positions in early summer. Place smaller divisions in pots and grow them in a cold frame, planting them when they are well established in the summer.

Management

Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani can survive following periodic draining and flooding of marshes. However, softstem bulrush stands can be reduced if prolonged draining and flooding continuously occurs.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Please check the Vendor Database, expected to be on-line through the PLANTS Web site in 2001 by clicking on Plant Materials.

References

Braun, L.E. 1967. *The monocotyledoneae from cat-tails to orchids*. The Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio.

Gleason, H. A. & A. Cronquist 1993. *Manual of vascular plants of northeastern United States and adjacent Canada*. 2nd ed. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York.

Guard, J.B. 1995. *Wetland plants of Oregon and Washington*. Lone Pine Publishing, Redmond, Washington.

Kantrud, H.A., J.B. Miller, & A.G. Van Der Valk 1989. *Vegetation of wetlands of the prairie pothole region*. In: Northern prairie wetlands. Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa.

Magee, D.W. 1981. *Freshwater wetlands: a guide to common indicator plants of the northeast*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Massachusetts.

Munz, P.A. 1965. *A California flora*. University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, California.

Steyermark, J. A. 1963. *Flora of Missouri*. The Iowa State University Press, Ames Iowa.

Strausbaugh, P. D. & E. L. Core 1977. *Flora of West Virginia*. 2nd ed. Seneca Books, Inc., Morgantown, West Virginia.

The Great Plains Flora Association 1986. *Flora of the Great Plains*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

Prepared By

Jammie Favorite

formerly USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Species Coordinator

Lincoln M. Moore

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Edited: 10jan02 jsp

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>>.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.