



SOFT-STEMMED BULRUSH

Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani

Also called great bulrush, softstem bulrush, and grey club-rush



Soft-stemmed bulrush has a wide native range--it's found nearly worldwide, including the Lake Champlain Basin. It is a rhizomatic, emergent, aquatic plant. Soft-stemmed bulrush typically forms a slowly-spreading clump of rush-like stems (culms) to 4-8 feet tall.

Habitat Preference

Found in standing water up to 3 feet deep along lake and pond margins, and may form dense stands.

Characteristics:

Vegetative

- Leaf type: no obvious leaf blades.
- Leaf shape: no obvious leaf blade.
- Leaf arrangement: alternate leaves and basal (grows lowest on the stem of a plant or flower).
- Leaf position: sheaths (basal part of a grass leaf that encircles the stem).

Flower

- Number of petals/sepals: 2-5
- Color: Red
- Attachment: attached to branches rather than to the main axis.

Fruit

- Orange-brown with a green or pale midrib.

Seed

- Flat on the back and rounded on the front, urn-shaped.





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Cultural History Notes

Used by Potawatomi and other Native American groups as a fiber in basket and textile weaving.

Ecological Contributions to Lake Champlain

Biological

- Seeds of soft-stemmed bulrush are an important food source for waterfowl.

Chemical

- Used to reduce pollutant loads carried by storm water runoff in urban wetlands.

Physical

- Bulrush forms a buffer against wind and wave action, thus permitting other aquatic plants to grow in an otherwise unfavorable environment.

Similar Species

Tule (*Schoenoplectus acutus*)

- Emergent native aquatic plant that grows to a similar height and has similar historical uses as soft-stemmed bulrush.



How to differentiate tule and soft-stemmed bulrush

- The two plants are visually difficult to differentiate. The best way to tell them apart is with the stem--tule is also called hard-stemmed bulrush. If the stem has large air pockets and is easily compressed between your fingers, it's likely soft-stemmed bulrush.
- Soft-stemmed bulrush tends to grow in soft, mucky substrate while tule prefers firm bottoms.

Scan to learn more about Lake Champlain's native aquatic plants!



The Lake Champlain Committee is a watershed-based nonprofit that uses science-based advocacy, education, and collaborative action to protect and restore water quality, safeguard natural habitats and ensure recreational access in the Lake Champlain Basin.



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