

*Arundo donax*

[Synonyms : *Arundo bifaria*, *Arundo donax* var. *versicolor*, *Arundo glauca*, *Arundo latifolia*, *Arundo sativa*, *Arundo versicolor*, *Cynodon donax*, *Donax arundinaceus*, *Donax donax*, *Scolochloa arundinacea*, *Scolochloa donax*]

**GIANT REED** is a grass. Native to Asia it has green turning to deep purple flower spikelets. It is also known as Bamboo reed, *Baranal* (Hindi), *Bansi* (Punjabi), *Cana* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Cana de Roca* (Portuguese), *Cana Vieira* (Portuguese), Cane, *Canne de Provence* (French), Distaff cane, *Donako* (Esperanto), *Gaha nal* (Bengali), Gardener's garters, Great reed, Indian grass, *Italiensk rör* (Swedish), *Jättiruoko* (Finnish), *Kaemperolr* (Danish), Persian reed, *Pfahlrohr* (German), Provence reed, *Qasba* (Maltese), Reed, *Riesenschilf* (German), *Roseau géant* (French), *Shembeko* (Ethiopian), *Spanisches Rohr* (German), Spanish cane, Spanish reed, *Spanskrór* (Swedish), and *Teberau gading* (Malay).

Cellulose is extracted from the stems.

*Donax* for most authorities is a Greek name for a kind of reed and for others it is a name specific to the 'Great Reed of Provence' (which, if not an introduced species, is difficult to identify).

Used for over 5,000 years to make wind instruments this is the 'reed' referred to in the *Bible*. Today the giant reed is used to make clarinets, bagpipes and organ-pipes.

Giant reeds have been employed for thatching since earliest times (although authorities suspect that it did not reach Egypt from southern Europe until after the fall of the ancient Egyptian civilization). In the Middle East however it is believed that the reeds were employed for the supports in parts of buildings such as the pointed arches. They were formed by shaping the reeds with layers of baked mud so that the dried mud arches remain after the reeds have disintegrated. Even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Marsh Arabs of Iraq could erect whole houses and other buildings this way with these reeds. Bound bundles of stems was used to make the framework (including curved arches as in the past) and reed matting was used for the roofs and walls.

In North America and Hawaii the stems have also been used for building sun-dried mud homes, as well as for latticework, screens and matting. Split giant reed stems, cleaned of pith, have been woven into baskets. These were a familiar sight on the southern plantations where the Negro slaves working there normally made baskets with them too. The Tohono O'odham North American Indian tribe used the pollen for a yellow dye, while for the Navajo tribe the stems played important parts in their ritual as it was not only used to make prayer sticks but also fashioned into both a whistle and a tasselled component of a special pouch which were used for chanting. Men of the Cahuilla Indian tribe played flutes made from giant reed.

From the earliest times the stems have been made into arrow shafts, and the Romans also used them to make pens.

The young shoots and the runners in the root network are nutritious and the root system can also be used to prevent soil erosion. The young shoots can provide fodder and are used in Arab countries especially (where they burn great areas of reeds each year to provide pasture in the following Spring).

Giant reed is also encouraged in many places as a windbreak.

Some authorities point out today that the giant reed's stems are a valuable commercial source of cellulose for making both paper and rayon material.

Medicinally, the underground stems have been used locally in the treatment of some period problems.

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The young shoots and the runners in the root network are nutritious and the root system can also be used to prevent soil erosion. The young shoots can provide fodder and are used in Arab countries especially (where they burn great areas of reeds each year to provide pasture in the following Spring).

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