

Equisetum hyemale

[Synonyms : *Equisetum hiemale*, *Equisetum hyemale* var. *californicum*, *Equisetum hyemale* var. *robustum*, *Equisetum praealtum*, *Equisetum robustum* var. *affine*, *Hippochaete hyemalis*]

ROUGH HORSETAIL is a perennial. Native to Europe it has jointed and stiff, green stems. It is also known as *Cídivka přezimující* (Czech), *Cídivka přezimující* (Czech), Common scouring rush, Dutch rush, Foxtail asparagus, Gunbright, Horse pipe, Horsetail, Horsetail reed, Horsetail rush, Pewterwort, Polishing rush, *Praslička zimná* (Slovak), *Přeslička zimní* (Czech), *Scharpruss* (German), Scouring horsetail, Scouring-rush, Scouring rush horsetail, Scrubbing rush, Scrubby-grass, Shave grass, *Skäfte* (Swedish), *Skavfräken* (Swedish), *Skavfräken* (Swedish), *Szu-lao-chu* (Chinese), Tall scouring rush, *Überwinternder Schachtelhalm* (German), Winter horsetail, and *Winter-Schachtelhalm* (German).

Warning – the whole plant can be poisonous for animals and they normally avoid it, fresh, when grazing.

Hyemale means ‘of Winter or flowering in Winter’.

Some authorities point out that rough horsetail was one of the most invaluable plants cultivated in Holland when she was reinforcing her dykes. It was grown on canal banks where its root systems did much to bind the loose and swampy soil.

At one time this species used also to be harvested and exported to Britain and other countries in quantity from the Netherlands for polishing metal, and it was apparently still being used this way in Austria in the 1950s. In fact authorities note that it seems to have been viewed like other horsetails, in times gone by, as a kind of sandpaper as it has also been used to smooth wood eg. arrows, or carving.

Like Europeans, some North American Indian tribes, including the Kiowa, Menominee, Chippewa, and Meskwaki, used the rough horsetail for scouring pots, pans and kettles. The Klamath, Cowlitz and Quinault tribes all used it to polish their arrow shafts, the Montana Indian tribe used it for pipes, bows, and arrows (and in the mists of time, tins and floors), and the Thompson, Bella Coola and Okanagan-Colville tribes used it on wooden and bone implements – the latter, even on their fingernails.

For the Sanpoil and Costanoan Indian tribes the roots offered material for basketry, and the Missouri River Indians used rough horsetail for making matting.

Children in the Havasupai tribe used the plant to make whistle-like sounds, and both the Gosiute and Dakota Indians made actual whistles from it. Sanpoil and Okanagan-Colville tribes found the hollow stems useful for giving medicine to babies, the Thompson Indians used the stem liquid as a weed killer. and the Cowlitz tribe made a stalk decoction for an insecticidal hair wash.

Records suggest that rough horsetail was eaten little by North American Indian tribes – although the Blackfoot made a drink from it, the roots provided some food for the Hoh and Quileute Indians, while the Cowlitz ate the stalk tops. On the other hand it does seem to have featured in some ritual, including the puberty rites practised by the Hoh and Quileute tribes and cleansing ceremonies performed by the Karok Indians.

As with field horsetail the Okanagan Colville fed it to their livestock in Winter when hay was

scarce, and it provided fodder for Meskwaki ponies, as well as the horses of some of the Dakota tribe.

In veterinary practice rough horsetail was a source of medicine for the horses of both the Cheyenne and Blackfoot tribes.

Unlike the Europeans, the North American Indian tribes are reported as having used the plant medicinally. Water from the boiled stems was used by the Kiowa, Cherokee, Carrier and Menominee tribes in remedies for kidney disorders, and the Iroquois and Carrier Indians used the plant for other urinary problems. It was taken as a 'tonic' by women of the Thompson, Kiowa and Menominee tribes after childbirth, and the Cree and Quinault Indians used it as a remedy for some period problems. Smoke from the burning leaves provided a disinfectant for Chippewa Indians, while the Okanagan-Colville used rough horsetail to treat sores on children's skin and ease symptoms experienced from too close a proximity to poison ivy. It yielded a laxative for the Cherokee, and a remedy for diarrhoea for the Makah Indians. Both the Meskwaki and the Okanagan-Colville tribes used it for treating some venereal disease, and the latter also turned to it for remedies for easing rheumatism and backache. Rough horsetail was used by the Flathead, Crow and Okanagan-Colville tribes for fluid retention. It was also part of treatment given by the Mahuna tribe for prostate problems. The Okanagan-Colville, Thompson and Karok Indians all used it as well for various eye disorders.