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Phleum pratense

[Synonyms : *Phleum nodosum*, *Phleum nodosum* var. *pratense*, *Phleum parnassicum*, *Phleum pratense* var. *nodosum*, *Plantinia pratensis*, *Stelephuras pratensis*]

TIMOTHY is a perennial grass. Native to central, northern and western Europe it has green or purplish spikelets

It is also known as *Ångskampe* (Swedish), *Bojíněk luční* (Czech), Cat's tail, Cat-tail grass, Common timothy, *Coue* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Cultivated timothy, *Cynffon-y-Gath* (Welsh), *Fleo herbeja* (Esperanto), *Fléole des prés* (French), Herd's grass, Horsegrass, June grass, *Kaminkehrer* (German), *Katzenschweif* (German), Large-leaved timothy grass, *Lieschgras* (German), Meadow cat's tail, *Nurmitähkiö* (Finnish), *Phléole des prés* (French), *Rhonwellt* (Welsh), *Timofejevka lugovaja* (Russian), *Timotei* (Finnish), *Timoteiheinä* (Finnish), *Timotej* (Swedish), *Timotejka lúčna* (Slovak), *Timothee* (German), Timothy grass, *Tymotka lakowa* (Polish), and *Wiesen-Lieschgras* (German).

The flowers are pollinated by the wind. The seeds are dispersed by wind, livestock and other agents.

Warning – in certain climates the pollen can be the cause of hay fever.

This grass is declared to be an invasive weed in parts of the north-eastern United States.

Pratense is derived from Latin *pratium* (meadow) meaning 'of or from meadows'.

When timothy was introduced to North America seems to be uncertain although stories about its name seem to be far clearer. Certainly in 1700 one of the English settlers in New England, John Herd, is supposed to have discovered it growing north of Boston, near Portsmouth and the Piscataqua River – and after his death New Englanders referred to it as Herd's grass. The grass was then destined to receive a helping hand further south (at the same time as spreading westward and into Canada). Apparently it is told that a gentleman by the name of Timothy Hansen introduced it from New England to Maryland probably in 1720 or 1747. First mention of it by the name Timothy seems to be in a letter dated 16th July 1747 written by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) the famous American statesman and scientist, to one Jared Elliot. In this he alludes to the grass as a 'mere timothy' (an alleged reference to Timothy Hansen). Timothy can now be found throughout the North American Continent except Labrador and Prince Edward Island in Canada.

For the North American Shuswap Indians this grass was fodder for their cows.

In contrast some of the Navajo Indians used the stems to make hair brushes.

Timothy has long provided nutritious feed both grazing and hay for livestock (particularly horses and cattle although authorities recognize that there are other grasses more suitable for fattening cattle) – and it has also become an important food for big game animals such as elk and deer. Small mammals also eat it and the seeds are especially enjoyed by both songbirds and gamebirds. Timothy can provide cover for many small mammals, gamebirds and waterfowl too. There are some grouse (including prairie chickens) and some ducks such as teal, which will nest in it.

According to some authorities timothy's heyday ran from about 1870-1910 when horses were needed on the farm and out on the road for pulling agricultural machinery or carriages,

coaches and carts. Certainly at the beginning of the 21st Century in the United States farmers' enthusiasm there for the grass as a hay crop is much less than in previous centuries – although perhaps it should be said that in the 1970s more than 6 million acres were still being cut annually for hay and that it is often grown in grass mixtures.

For environmentalists timothy is a plant that has to be used with care not least because it can spread rapidly and invade and dominate areas adjacent to those specifically targeted.

Despite this reservation however it has been used widely in a broad range of climates in reclamation (after say strip mining, or rail, road or other construction), land rehabilitation (after say fire or overgrazing) and erosion control programmes. It has also been chosen for some flood control régimes with some success as when strategically sown for example on sand and gravel bars in streams.

Medicinally, herbalists have used timothy extracts to treat tumours.