

## SOFTSTEM BULRUSH

*Schoenoplectus  
tabernaemontani* (K.C. Gmel.)  
Palla  
Plant Symbol = SCTA2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data  
Center



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USDA, NRCS, Wetland Sciences Institute  
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### 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.

Plant Materials <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

Plant Fact Sheet/Guide Coordination Page <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/pfs.html>>

National Plant Data Center <<http://npdc.usda.gov>>

## 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)

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

## References

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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>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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