

# CHIP CHAT

Newsletter of the Big Chippewa Lake Association

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## Association Dock Plates Have Arrived!

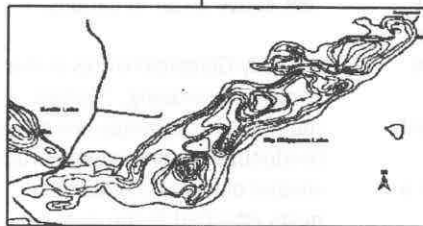
At the annual meeting for the Big Chippewa Lake Association in June, the Board of Directors disclosed its intention to draw old and new members of the Association into the fold by offering a unique, one-time perk.

Each paid family membership receives a "Dock Plate" bearing the Big Chip Lake Association name and a picture of the lake. The plates are made of metal and are comparable in size and shape to a motor vehicle license plate. The lake picture is based on the one

shown here, and has been enhanced with color.

Dock Plates were produced at a cost of \$5.00 per plate, and are available at no extra charge upon payment of 1996-97 annual Lake Association dues of \$10.00.

Dock Plates are available on a "one plate per family" basis. The Association does not intend to make the Dock Plates available again for several years, so you are encouraged to join the Big Chip Lake Association this year in order to take advantage of this opportunity. Membership forms are attached to this newsletter.



**C**attails are no stranger to much of Minnesota's lake-going community. Commonly recognized by their brown club-shaped spikes of seeds, they fill many surprising niches both in the natural world and in the kitchens of lakeshore residents.

According to Helen Russell in her book "Foraging for Dinner," the seedhead gives the plant its scientific name of "Typha," from an old Greek

word for "mallet" or "hammer." In some places the plant is called "reed mace" because of its resemblance to the medieval clubs that were used by chieftains to keep order.

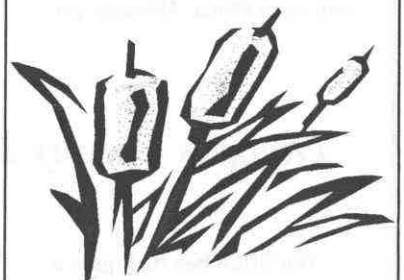
There are two common species of cattail in the United States. Extremely invasive, narrow-leaved cattail has slender flexible iris-like leaves that are yellowish green to dark green, less than an inch wide and three- to five- feet-long on plants growing four- to eight- feet tall. Common cattail is the

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## Cattails

### More Than Just A Feast for the Eyes

by Christina Erdmann



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## *Cattails...continued from page 1*

largest and the most competitive of the species and has leaves six feet or more long. Common cattail leaves are about an inch wide, twice the width of narrow-leaved cattail foliage. The scientific name of each species describes the leaves with *lati*, meaning "broad," *angusti*, meaning "narrow," and *folia*, meaning "leaves" or "foliage."

A third, less common species is the more refined and slender dwarf Japanese cattail with the half-inch wide leaves one to two feet long on plants reaching 2-1/2 feet high. This graceful plant spreads more slowly than the other species, but still grows in a determined manner.

For the two more common cattail species, in July or August the four- to 12-inch-long cattail appears, looking like a fat brown cigar before shattering to tens of thousands of seeds and forming a cotton-like fluff in late fall. Cattail is found growing naturally in roadsided ditches, fresh water marshes, in shallow water bordering ponds, and along slowly moving rivers throughout most to the United States, Europe, and even Africa. Although we

commonly think of cattails as swamp plants, they can be grown in pots if kept moist, and in yards, planted near drain spouts.

Cattails play many important natural roles. Cattail roots stabilize shorelines and river banks. Deer sometimes find shelter in the cattail beds, while bitterns – heron-like birds – build their delicate, solitary nests several feet above water in cattails.

Judy Glattstein writes in her book *Waterscaping*, "Cattail marshes and swamps are highly productive wildlife habitats: red-winged blackbirds build their nests attached to the swaying stalks, waterfowl use the fluff to line their nests, muskrats eat the roots, and the plants themselves remove pollutants from the water such as excess fertilizer – nutrients that lead to eutrophication."

Milton W. Weller, a professor at the University of Minnesota, writes in his book "Freshwater Marshes:" "There is increasing evidence that water that flows through a marsh comes out cleaner and less enriched with

most nutrients than when it entered. Engineers are taking advantage of this cleansing principle, using both natural and cultivated plants, such as cattails, for settling basins in nutrient traps."

He also notes that burning cattail reeds may be used as a substitute for fossil fuels. Cattail use for energy is now under serious study in Minnesota.

Next to their ecological importance, cattails have been beneficial to humans on a practical level for ages. Native Americans used cattail medicinally to treat upset stomach and diarrhea. The cattail leaves were plaited for mats or twined or coiled into baskets, and the fluffy down was used to pad cradleboards and as diapers. Many know that the dried brown spikes make excellent torches when dipped in oil or tallow.

Native Americans were the first to use cattails as a food source. In late May or early June, the nutritious pollen still is gathered to be used to thicken

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*"Native Americans were the first to use cattails as a food source."*

## *Douglas County Lakes Association News*

The DCLA has had quite a busy summer and fall. The Association worked at a fierce pace in addressing issues of concern in the drafting and passage of the Douglas County Shoreland Ordinance. As passed, the ordinance protects bluff and shore impact zones from less restrictive excavating, landscaping and building. (See more on page 3)

The DCLA has also been a financial supporter for both 1996 and 1997 Kids' Groundwater Festival Activities.

Currently, the DCLA is working to develop subcommittees intended to investigate and implement programs which would be most beneficial to the member lake associations. Program ideas included, among other

things, efforts to build a financial pool for funding potential milfoil clean-up, for providing public access patrol personnel to the member lakes on holiday weekends, and for providing member lake associations funding resources for their own projects. Watch for details of these programs in future newsletters.

