

25# Cattails

Look around the edge of the Class of 1918 Marsh. I'll bet you see a sea of tall plants with leaves that look like swords. These are cattails.

Look closely. Are they all the same? Do leaves on some plants look wider than others? Do you see the "hot dog on a stick" at the top of the main stalk? During summer, you'll probably see two types of flowers on the stalk that are hotdog like. The upper one is probably yellowish because of all of the pollen and the lower one is probably brownish and might even look and feel fuzzy. It's okay to touch.

Two species of cattails live here. Common, or wide-leaved, cattail is native. Narrow-leaved cattail is an invader. For broadleaf cattails, the two types of "hotdog" like flowers are close together almost touching. For narrow-leaved cattails, the space between the two types of flowers is bigger. Which species is most abundant?

Too many cattails of any kind can be bad for the marsh. They might fill the entire marsh, squeezing out the open water that nesting ducks need.

But cattails can also be good habitat. Red-winged blackbirds perch on them and even build their nests above the water among the leaves.

You will see duckweed, one of the smallest water plants, with three floating leaves and a tiny root beneath hanging in the water. You may see rushes with round stems or coontail with bushy tail-like leaves.