



Plants & History

The people's choice

Papyrus

Cyperus papyrus

Why it was chosen

Papyrus was probably first used to make paper in Egypt around 4000 BC and is the forerunner of modern paper (the word paper is derived from papyrus).

Papyrus were rolled for storage until a less cumbersome method was found - binding sheets together between hard covers. This was called a codex and was the predecessor of the book.

What it is

Papyrus belongs to the sedge family, the *Cyperaceae*, which are widespread throughout wetlands and the tropics. Papyrus is a distant relative of our native cotton grass and bull rush.

Where it grows

In its natural habitat of Africa, Madagascar and the southern Mediterranean, papyrus can grow to a height of 5 metres. It is widely grown for ornamental purposes, but will not tolerate hard frosts.

Did you know?

Egypt once again has a flourishing papyrus paper industry but the future of the plant may lie in its ecological importance. It is now being used to control soil erosion throughout Africa and the raw material is used to manufacture biofuels in the tropics.

What the scientists say

Papyrus was the first robust and portable medium that allowed information to be recorded, stored and exchanged. Making new scientific discoveries widely available is crucial to the scientific process and hundreds of paper and electronic journals are published every month to allow scientists to exchange and test new knowledge. This knowledge can then be passed on to a wider audience and can benefit millions of people.

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