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PLANTS PEOPLE  
POSSIBILITIES



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SEPASAL is a database and enquiry service about useful "wild" and semi-domesticated plants of tropical and subtropical drylands, developed and maintained at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. "Useful" includes plants which humans eat, use as medicine, feed to animals, make things from, use as fuel, and many other uses.

Since 2004, there has been a Namibian SEPASAL team, based at the National Botanical Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture which has been updating the information on Namibian species from Namibian and southern African literature and unpublished sources. By August 2007, over 700 Namibian species had been updated.

Work on updating species information, and adding new species to the database, is ongoing. It may be worth visiting the web site and querying the database to obtain the latest information for this species.

*Internet SEPASAL*

New query

Edit query

View query results

 *Display help*In names list include:  synonyms  vernacular names and display: All  names per page*Your query found 29 taxa***Cyperus papyrus L.**

Family: CYPERACEAE

**Synonyms**

None recorded

**Vernacular names**

Afrikaans (Namibia)	papyrus [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
Afrikaans (South Africa)	papyrus [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]
English (Botswana)	papyrus [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]
English (Namibia)	papyrus [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
German (Namibia)	Papyrusstaude [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
Kxoe (Namibia)	gyara [ <a href="#">5083</a> ], koama [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
Rumanyo (Namibia)	likoma [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
Thimbukushu	djaradjara [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
Thimbukushu (Namibia)	dikoma [ <a href="#">5083</a> ]
Thonga (South Africa)	adumu [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]
Unknown (Botswana)	koma [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]
Zulu (South Africa)	ibumi [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]

**Partial distribution**

Plant origin	Continent	Region	Botanical country
Native	Africa	East Tropical Africa	Kenya [ <a href="#">6544</a> ], Tanzania [ <a href="#">6544</a> ], Uganda [ <a href="#">6544</a> ]
		Northeast Tropical Africa	Chad, Sudan
		Northern Africa	Egypt
		South Tropical Africa	Mozambique [ <a href="#">5480</a> ], Zambia [ <a href="#">5481</a> ], Zimbabwe [ <a href="#">2506</a> ] [ <a href="#">5419</a> ]
		Southern Africa	Botswana [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">5177</a> ] [ <a href="#">5700</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ], Namibia [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">5149</a> ] [ <a href="#">5183</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ], Natal [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">5303</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ], Transvaal [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ]
		West Tropical Africa	Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal

.		Western Indian Ocean	Madagascar
	Asia-Temperate	Western Asia	Israel
Introduced	Europe	Southeastern Europe	Sicilia

**ISO countries:** South Africa [[5104](#)]

## Descriptors

Category	Descriptors and states
DESCRIPTION	Herb [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">5123</a> ]; Aquatic [ <a href="#">5713</a> ]; Erect [ <a href="#">5123</a> ]; Rhizomatous [ <a href="#">5303</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ]; Perennial [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ] [ <a href="#">6544</a> ]; Plant Height 0.17-4.5 m [ <a href="#">5104</a> ]
CLIMATE	Subtropical, Hot and Arid [ <a href="#">5104</a> ]; Weak Dry Season [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]
SOILS	Permanently Waterlogged [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]; Sandy [ <a href="#">5123</a> ]; Peat/Organic Substrates [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]
HABITAT	Coastal Regions [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]; Dominant within Stands of Natural Vegetation [ <a href="#">5713</a> ]; Watercourses [ <a href="#">5123</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ]; Permanent Watercourses [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]; Lakes/Ponds/Pools [ <a href="#">5713</a> ]; Vlei/Dambo/Seasonally Flooded Grassland [ <a href="#">5303</a> ] [ <a href="#">6544</a> ]; Altitude 7-2100 m a.s.l. [ <a href="#">5104</a> ] [ <a href="#">6544</a> ]
PRODUCTION AND VALUE	Wild Plants Utilised [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]
FURTHER DATA SOURCES	Botanical Illustration [ <a href="#">5177</a> ] [ <a href="#">5713</a> ] [ <a href="#">6544</a> ]; Additional References [ <a href="#">6579</a> ]; Botanical Photograph [ <a href="#">5177</a> ] [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]; Databases [ <a href="#">5123</a> ]; Grid Map [ <a href="#">5123</a> ] [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]
SEPASAL DATASHEET STATUS	Taxon Recently Added from Literature [ <a href="#">6040</a> ]

## Uses

Major use	Use group	Specific uses
FOOD	Unspecified Parts	
	Stems	sugar; other stem parts, raw [ <a href="#">2506</a> ]
ANIMAL FOOD	Aerial Parts	unspecified aerial parts, mammals, forage [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]; stems, mammals, forage [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]; stems, primates, forage [ <a href="#">2514</a> ]
MATERIALS	Unspecified Materials	boats/ships
	Fibres	thatch; netting; woven material, clothing; matting; paper; stems, paper [ <a href="#">5177</a> ] [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]; stems, woven material, doors [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]; unspecified aerial parts, rafts [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]; stems, pulp [ <a href="#">1340</a> ]; stems, woven material [ <a href="#">2506</a> ]; stems, boats/ships [ <a href="#">2506</a> ]; stems, woven material, baskets [ <a href="#">5118</a> ]; stems, woven material, mats [ <a href="#">5118</a> ]
MEDICINES	Unspecified Medicinal Disorders	humans
	Respiratory System Disorders	stems, humans, coughs [ <a href="#">5177</a> ]
ENVIRONMENTAL USES	Unspecified Environmental Uses	saline soils
	Erosion Control	watercourses [ <a href="#">5238</a> ]
	Ornamentals	unspecified aerial parts, everlasting 'flowers'; live plant in situ, gardens [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]; stems, landscapes [ <a href="#">5303</a> ]

## Picture

None recorded

## Notes

## NOMENCLATURE/TAXONOMY

### *Name derivation:*

'Cuperos' (Latin) and 'keiperos' (Greek) - sedge or rush. 'Papyraceous' - Latin for papery, referring to the use of this plant [5177] .

## DISTRIBUTION

### *Zimbabwe:*

Along the Zambesi river above the Victoria Falls [2506] .

### *Namibia:*

Grootfontein District [5183] .

## DESCRIPTION

### *Height:*

0.17-4.5 m [5104] .

### *Height:*

In Botswana up to 4 m [5177] .

### *Height:*

Largest sedge in Africa, up to 2.5 m [5303] .

### *Inflorescence:*

Involucral bracts up to 12, much shorter than the inflorescences, 5-10 mm long, 10-30 mm wide, light brown, never green. Inflorescence compound, spreading, umbel-like with 30-100 subequal rays 100-600 (-80) mm long.

Secondary rays 3-5 mm long [5713] .

### *Leaves:*

Bladeless on culms. Sheaths blackish or reddish-brown, becoming woody below. Sterile shoots with leaf blades up to 8 mm wide [5713] .

### *Life form:*

Cyperoid, emergent hydrophyte, occasional sudd hydrophyte [5104] .

### *Lifeform:*

Hyperhydrates/pleustophytes [5713] .

### *Roots:*

Rhizomes creeping, 30-60 mm thick, densely covered with 50-100 mm long and wide blackish scales [5713] .

### *Seed:*

Nutlet 0.9-1.1 mm long and 0.4-0.5 mm wide, ovate, triangular, greyish with almost smooth surface [6544] .

### *Stems:*

Culms erect, 3-sided with rounded angles, smooth, green [5713] .

## IDENTIFICATION

Easily identified by its giant, leafless, obtusely triangular culm. It is sometimes confused with *C. penzoanus* but that species is less robust, having a sharply triangular culm and major involucral bracts green and leafy [6544] .

## FOOD - STEMS

In northern Namibia the people in the Okavango eat the lower part of the stalk [5118] .

### *Other stem parts, raw:*

In the Okavango swamps the thick pith is chewed as sugar cane [2506] .

## ANIMAL FOOD - AERIAL PARTS

*Stems, primates, forage:*

Chimpanzees in Tanzania eat the pith of the stem (Nishida & Uehara 1983) [2514] .

*Unspecified aerial parts, stems, mammals, forage:*

It has a low forage quality, and therefore supports few herbivores. It grows in unstable peat deposits unsuitable as a habitat for large herbivores, except the sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekei*), which has splayed hooves and feeds on young shoots [5177] .

## **MATERIALS - FIBRES**

*Woven material, doors, stems:*

In Natal (South Africa) the stems are split, dried and woven to make traditional doors [5303] .

*Paper, stems:*

Used for making the scrolls of emergent literate civilizations [5303] .

*Rafts, unspecified aerial parts:*

Used to make rafts for transport downstream in the panhandle of the Okavango Delta [5177] .

*Woven material, baskets, mats, stems:*

In northern Namibia it is used for weaving harvest baskets and mats for the people's huts [5118] .

## **MEDICINES - RESPIRATORY SYSTEM DISORDERS**

*Stems, humans, coughs:*

In Botswana the outer stem covering is used to make a cough remedy [5177] .

## **ENVIRONMENTAL USES - EROSION CONTROL**

Sedges play an important role in controlling erosion along watercourses [5238] .

## **CONSTRAINTS - MISCELLANEOUS**

Can form floating rafts in Botswana which block channels [5177] .

In some of the tropical rivers in Zimbabwe it forms a dense mass of leafless stems known as 'sudd' [2506] .

It has a low forage quality and it grows in unstable peat deposits unsuitable as a habitat for large herbivores [5177] . Sometimes forming a dense, impenetrable, floating mass in deep water and then obstructing fishing-boats and ships [6544] .

## **ALTITUDE**

*East Africa:*

450-2100 m [6544] .

*Southern Africa:*

7-1000 m [5104] [5713] .

## **TOPOGRAPHY/SITES**

*Botswana:*

Permanent swamps, especially fringing the major rivers, can form floating rafts which block channels [5177] .

*East Africa:*

In wet swamps and lake edges [6544] .

*Namibia:*

Riverbanks and islands [5123] .

*Southern Africa:*

In water in lakes and along rivers or forming floating mats or islands [5713] .

## **HYBRIDISATION**

In southern Africa it hybridises with other species [5713] .

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Updated for southern Africa by E. Irish, checked by C. Mannheimer; SEPASAL Namibia, National Botanical Research Institute, March 2007 .

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