

Typha latifolia 'Variegata'

Variegated Cattail

Reaching a height of five-plus feet, the variegated cattail with its bright green and white vertically striped foliage is an elegant, colorful and bold addition to the water garden. It can be an accent planting, a stand-alone in a decorative container and/or perform the role of a background screen to hide something from view such as pond equipment. The coloration gives it a light and airy look.



Variegated cattail (*Typha latifolia* 'Variegata')

Typha latifolia 'Variegata' is a robust grower with running rhizomes but is not as aggressive as the native cattail Typha latifolia. I find this cattail easier to divide than the other varieties I have grown. I have no experience with the native one but have grown the graceful and dwarf (minima) cattails. Once out of the pot, the rhizomes of the variegated variety can be teased apart with patience. For ease of handling, I grow it in a two-gallon container, sometimes three. I feed in the spring or when repotting and again around the 4th of July.

It produces light green catkins in mid-summer. These are easy to overlook as they are the same green color as the foliage. They mature to rich brown in late summer and pop open in the fall, releasing the fluffy seeds. The seeds are reported to be sterile. That seems to be true. Many seeds have drifted around my other marginal plants over the years and none have sprouted with other plants. It does not produce flowers the year divided but does the following year. I have divided in mid-summer hoping I would see a catkin(s) the following year. Sometimes. Plant seems happier when disturbed in the spring, giving it a full season to recover. It likes to be slightly pot-bound but will eventually need to be refreshed.



Mature catkin releases its seeds.

The cattail flower has two parts - the thin spike at the top is the staminate (male) flower.

This colorful cattail prefers full sun but will tolerate a little less. It is hardy to zone 4, maybe zone 3. It likes moist soil to shallow water - from water just over the top of the pot to maybe six inches. It winters on the shallow water garden shelf where it spent the summer.

It is suggested that water gardeners not grow cattails and rightly so as some hybrids have escaped and mixed with the native one. If grown responsibly (containerized) and any extras disposed of properly, the variegated cattail is less aggressive and it is a really lovely addition to the water garden. Final word - even grown in a container, keep it away from a natural body of water. The rhizomes/roots will not stay in the pot forever. They will break out.