

# An introduction to Grasses, Sedges and Rushes

**Magic**  
**5**



the  
species  
recovery  
trust

## The Grass Family (Poaceae)

~ 120 species in UK  
~11,000 species globally

### Key characteristics

- Usually hollow stem
- Shallow roots
- Leaf blade extends from a sheath on the stem, with a 'ligule' (either a membrane or line of hairs) where the leaf connects to the stem.
- Inflorescence at top of stem holds flowers
- Wind pollinated



### British wild species

- Quaking-grass (*Briza media*)
- Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*)
- Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*)
- Perennial Ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*)
- Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*)

### 🌍 Around the world

- Sorghum
- Pampas grass
- Buffalo grass
- Sugarcane
- Rice

### Uses

- Food (Cereal crops including barley, maize, oats, rice and wheat.)
- Fodder e.g. sorghum
- Building materials (bamboo)
- Canes

## Master your Grasses with the Magic 5!

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### BEGINNER

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Yorkshire fog       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Perennial Ryegrass  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quaking grass       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Annual Meadow-grass | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cock's-foot         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

### INTERMEDIATE

- |                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Mat-grass          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wall Barley        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Common Bent        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tufted Hair-grass  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sweet Vernal-grass | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

### ADVANCED

- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Red Fescue v. Sheep's Fescue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Velvet Bent-grass            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Smaller Cat's-tail           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Crested Dog's-tail           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Small Sweet-grass            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

### TWITCHER

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Lesser Hairy-brome   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bulbous Meadow-grass | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cut-grass            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dwarf Sedge          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Soft-leaved Sedge    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## The Rushes (Juncaceae)

24 species in UK  
~400 species globally

### Key characteristics

- Flowers in a tight bundle
- Nutty brown fruits
- Tubular, waxy thick evergreen stems
- Occur in damp places



### Uses

- Crop for livestock as component of pastures
- Fuel in the treeless Andes mountains – *Distichia*
- Basket and chair weaving
- Candles

## Master your Rushes with the Magic 5!

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### BEGINNER

- Soft Rush ☐
  - Hard Rush ☐
  - Toad-rush ☐
  - Compact Rush ☐
  - Heath Rush ☐
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### ADVANCED

- Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) ☐
  - Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*) ☐
  - Bulbous Rush ☐
- 

### TWITCHER

- Pigmy Rush ☐
- Three-flowered Rush ☐
- Dwarf Rush ☐

## The Sedges (Cyperaceae)

~106 species in UK  
~4,500 species globally

### Key characteristics

- Leaves with closed sheaths and sharply-angled, some have three-edged stems
- Small hard fruits – 'nuts' often in tight clusters on spikes



### British wild species

- Remote Sedge- woods
- Pendulous Sedge – damp places
- Green-ribbed Sedge - heathlands
- Cottongrass - bogs

### Uses

- Paper – *Cyperus papyrus*
- Food – Chinese Water Chestnut
- Housing thatch - *Cladium* and *Phalaris* spp.
- Canoes on Lake Titicaca – *Scirpus totara*

## Master your Sedges with the Magic 5!

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### BEGINNER

- Pendulous Sedge ☐
  - Glaucous Sedge ☐
  - Cotton-grass ☐
  - Remote Sedge ☐
  - Hairy Sedge ☐
- 

### INTERMEDIATE

- Star Sedge ☐
  - Spring Sedge ☐
  - Wood Sedge ☐
  - Green-ribbed Sedge ☐
  - Carnation Sedge ☐
- 

### ADVANCED

- Yellow Sedges ☐
  - Thin-spiked Wood-sedge ☐
  - Greater Pond-sedge ☐
  - Water Sedge ☐
  - Slender Sedge ☐
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### TWITCHER

- Brown Galingale ☐
- Starved Wood-sedge ☐
- Fingered Sedge ☐
- Dwarf Sedge ☐
- Soft-leaved Sedge ☐



## Wood-rushes (*Luzula*) (Juncaceae)

9 species in UK

### Key characteristics

- Tufted perennials
- Leaves flat and usually very hairy
- Range of sizes and habitats
- Flowers often have visible dangling yellow stamens





## Master your Wood-rushes with the Magic 5!

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### INTERMEDIATE

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Field Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula campestris</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Heath Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula multiflora</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Great Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula sylvatica</i> )  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

### ADVANCED

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Hairy Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula pilosa</i> )      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Southern Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula forsteri</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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### TWITCHER

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Fen Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula pallescens</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Curved Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula arcuata</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spiked Wood-rush ( <i>Luzula spicata</i> ) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## The Reed Family (Poaceae, Sparganiaceae, Typhaceae)

Vernacular term used to group numerous tall, often unrelated grass-like plants of wet places.



Ditch with reeds



### British wild species

- Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)
- Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*)
- Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*)
- Great Reed-mace (*Typha latifolia*)
- Reed sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*)

### 🌐 Around the world

- Giant Reed

### Uses

- Musical instruments (Giant Reed for woodwind instruments)
- Water treatment (micro-organisms living on the root system of reeds)

## Master your Reeds with the Magic 5!

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### BEGINNER

- Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) ☐  
Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) ☐
- 

### INTERMEDIATE

- Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) ☐  
Sweet-flag (*Acorus calamus*) ☐  
Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*) ☐  
Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*) ☐  
Lesser Reedmace (*Typha angustifolia*) ☐
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### ADVANCED

- Least Bur-reed (*Sparganium minimum*) ☐  
Floating Bur-reed (*Sparganium angustifolium*) ☐

**Magic 5 aims gently to introduce people to the magical and diverse world of the UK flora, simplifying, but at the same time inspiring a growing knowledge of our wild plant heritage.**

There are over 5,000 species of flowering plants, ferns, bryophytes and lichens in the UK, which can be fairly intimidating. This course breaks down that flora into several bite-size chunks, and while it won't teach you every species, it will highlight important groups and allow you confidently to identify some commonly encountered flowering plant families based on several key features.

Other courses will introduce similar bite size chunks of the remaining four parts of the plant kingdom –opening people's eyes and imagination to the exciting, diverse yet often overlooked world of lichens, bryophytes, ferns and grasses whilst giving an overview of the whole of the UK flora.

1. Lichens
2. Bryophytes
3. Ferns
4. Grasses
5. Flowers

### **The Species Recovery Trust**

is a charity dedicated to saving some of the rarest species in the UK, and educating and enthusing the public about wildlife around them.

More details of our work, our training courses and how you can support us can be found at;

[www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk](http://www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk)