

Papyrus



Figure 1: *Papyrus (Cyperus papyrus)*.



Figure 2: The ancient Egyptians used parts of the tall papyrus plant to make paper, household utensils, and boats.



Figure 3: A section of an ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead includes painting and writing on papyrus.



Figure 4: A long papyrus manuscript has rolled ends. Several sheets were glued end to end to form a continuous roll of paper.

The ancient Egyptians made a kind of paper from the stalks of a reed called papyrus, or paper plant. The plant's scientific name is *Cyperus papyrus* (family Cyperaceae). The paper made from the plant is also called papyrus.

Papyrus is a grasslike aquatic plant that grows up to about 15 feet (4.6 meters) tall. It is found in quietly flowing water up to 3 feet (90 centimeters) deep. Its green, jointless, bluntly triangular stems bear long, sharp leaves. Radiating flower clusters bloom at the tip of each stem. The papyrus plant is now often used as an ornamental plant in water gardens in warm areas or in conservatories. The dwarf species, which only grows up to about 2 feet (60 centimeters) tall, is sometimes potted and grown indoors.

The ancient Egyptians grew the papyrus plant in the Nile delta region. They used the stem of the plant to make sails, cloth, mats, and cords. They also made a paper from the pith, or inner portion, of the stalk. To do that, they cut the pith into thin strips. They then placed a number of the strips side by side, topping them with another set of strips placed at a right angle. The two layers formed a sheet, which the Egyptians dampened and pressed. Upon drying, the glue-like sap of the plant acted as an adhesive and cemented the layers together. Finally, the Egyptians hammered the sheet and dried it in the sun. The paper was pure white in color and, if well-made, was free of spots, stains, or other defects. The Egyptians subsequently joined a number of the sheets—usually no more than 20—together with paste to form a roll.

Paper made from papyrus was the chief writing material in ancient Egypt. The Greeks adopted it, and it was used extensively in the Roman Empire. People used

it not only for the production of books (in roll or scroll form) but also for correspondence and legal documents.

The use of papyrus for writing material began to die out in Egypt after the 9th century ad. At that time the manufacture of paper from other plant fibers made papyrus unnecessary. By the 3rd century ad, papyrus had already begun to be replaced in Europe by the less-expensive parchment (made from processed animal skins). However, the use of papyrus for books and documents persisted on and off until about the 12th century.

Cite (MLF Format)

"Papyrus." *Britannica School*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 16 May. 2018.
school.eb.com/levels/middle/article/papyrus/276275. Accessed 22 Sep. 2019.

Cite (APA Format)

Papyrus. (2019). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from
<https://school.eb.com/levels/middle/article/papyrus/276275>