

PAPYRUS



Did you know?

The English word for paper comes from the word papyrus.

The papyrus plant was used by the ancient Egyptians for thousands of years to make many things including paper.



The papyrus plant has a triangular stem with a dense cluster of thin stems on top.

THE PLANT

The papyrus plant, *Cyperus papyrus*, grows in the Nile Delta and Nile River Valley. It had a long triangular stalk that grew up to 5 metres tall. In the time of the ancient Egyptians, large amounts of papyrus grew in the mud on the banks the Nile, but the papyrus plant is less common today.

rope, sandals, boxes, baskets and even small boats! And that's not all, papyrus flower was used to make perfume and medicines.

PAPYRUS PAPER

Papyrus is not only the name of the plant, but also the paper that is made from the plant. Papyrus was used to make paper as early as 3,000 BC and was used for thousands of years.

Papyrus paper was expensive to make, so it was mainly used for religious and official documents. Most Egyptians couldn't afford papyrus, so they would write on other materials, like stone or wood. Even scribes had to practise on wood before they could start writing on papyrus.

Papyrus paper was strong and durable. Many ancient papyrus documents have been preserved. These include literature, religious texts, drawings, criminal investigations, official records medical textbooks, math problems, magical texts and cartoons.

USES OF PAPYRUS

The most well-known use of papyrus is papyrus paper, but Egyptians had many uses for the plant. Papyrus was a staple food for Egyptians. They would bake the root and eat it, using it much like we use potatoes.

The outer skin of the papyrus plant was used to make many items including furniture,



Sayed Farag demonstrates the making of papyrus at the Nefertiti Papyrus Institute in Luxor, Egypt.

MAKING PAPYRUS

These are the steps Egyptians used to make papyrus paper after the stalk was harvested.

- 1. The outer fibre was peeled away.**
- 2. The stem was cut into thin strips.**
- 3. The strips were rolled or beaten with a mallet and soaked in water for six days.**
- 4. A layer of papyrus strips were laid side by side, overlapping slightly.**
- 5. Another layer of strips were placed at a right angle to the first layer.**
- 6. The layers were pressed and dried in the sun.**
- 7. The papyrus sheet was rubbed with a stone to make it smooth.**

Sheets of papyrus could be attached to each other to make long rolls which could be transported easily or made into a scroll.

READING RESPONSE

1

How tall does the papyrus plant grow?

2

Where did papyrus grow in the time of the ancient Egyptians?

3

Name five uses the ancient Egyptians had for the papyrus plant:

4

What did scribes practise on before using papyrus?

5

Fill in the blanks in the list of steps for making papyrus:

1. The outer fibre was _____.
2. The stem was cut into _____.
3. The strips were beaten with a mallet and soaked in water for _____.
4. A layer of papyrus strips were laid side by side, _____ slightly.
5. Another layer of strips were placed at a right angle to the first layer.
6. The layers were pressed and _____.
7. The papyrus sheet was rubbed with a _____ to make it smooth.

READING RESPONSE

1

How tall does the papyrus plant grow?

The papyrus plant grows up to 5 metres tall.

2

Where did papyrus grow in the time of the ancient Egyptians?

Large amounts of papyrus grew in the mud on the banks the Nile.

3

Name five uses the ancient Egyptians had for the papyrus plant:

Making food, furniture, rope, sandals, boxes, baskets, small boats, perfume, medicines and paper.

4

What did scribes practise on before using papyrus?

Scribes had to practise on wood before they could start writing on papyrus.

5

Fill in the blanks in the list of steps for making papyrus:

1. The outer fibre was *peeled away*.
2. The stem was cut into *thin strips*.
3. The strips were beaten with a mallet and soaked in water for *six days*.
4. A layer of papyrus strips were laid side by side, *overlapping* slightly.
5. Another layer of strips were placed at a right angle to the first layer.
6. The layers were pressed and *dried in the sun*.
7. The papyrus sheet was rubbed with a *stone* to make it smooth.