

Harvesting Materials for Your St. Brigid's Cross

The most common materials used in the making of St. Brigid's Cross is the very common Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*). Found growing on wet ground or in places with infertile soil, the Soft Rush can produce over eight thousand seeds per shoot every year!

Rushes typically grow up to one metre tall and grow in tufts of dark green stems with small brown flowerheads that can still be seen through winter on some stems.

These resilient and invasive native plants can be found in low-lying fields, on roadsides, in bogs and marshes and near water's edge countrywide.

When harvesting, select the tallest and greenest tufts, pull the dead grass out from the base of the stems with your fingers and, using a scissors or secateurs, cut as close to the ground as possible.

One large handful should contain about 30 rush stems – enough to make one St. Brigid's Cross.

Larger Rushes, such as the Bulrush, were also used to make St. Brigid's Crosses, as well as furniture, mats, mattresses, chicken houses and other uses.

Another material that may be used is the Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). This vegetation grows in dense stands along freshwater wetlands, rivers, lakes and canals. It can grow to over 5 metres tall!

Traditionally used for thatching, the Common Reed has been used extensively in Ireland for thousands of years.

Reeds can be trickier to harvest and more difficult to locate, but may be easier to find for some Cross-makers.

***Please take the necessary precautions when harvesting your materials. Be careful with sharp tools and be mindful of the hazards associated with open water and boggy ground.**

****Please keep within your 5K while harvesting materials.**

Learn more about Soft Rushes and Common Reeds at the following links:

<https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/irish-wetlands-guide.pdf>

<https://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/Species/35951>

<http://wetlands.ie/index.php/the-common-reed-phragmites-australis/>

<https://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/Dataset/35/Species/43600>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L028TUatFxQ&ab_channel=IrishHistoryDocumentaries

<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Country-Life/Exhibitions/Straw,-Hay-Rushes>

<https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4672101/4670194/4683347>