

The Cyperaceae, or the sedge family is a group of plants that is often avoided by many people. This avoidance, and sometimes fear, is due in part to the difficulty sometimes encountered in trying to correctly identify certain species in certain genera. Technical manuals are usually needed and a familiarity with the botanical terms used to describe the morphological features of sedges are required. In addition, species in the sedge family do not have a showy, colorful appearance as the wildflowers do and thus are often overlooked in the field.

Delaware contains an impressive diversity of sedges, with over 200 species and varieties known to exist in the state. The sedge family is the third largest family of plants in the state (i.e., the total number of species and varieties) and contains the largest genus in the state, *Carex*, with over 100 species and varieties. The sedge family in Delaware is represented by 15 genera: *Bulbostylis*, *Carex*, *Cladium*, *Cyperus*, *Dulichium*, *Eleocharis*, *Eriophorum*, *Fimbristylis*, *Fuirena*, *Kyllinga*, *Rhynchospora*, *Schoenoplectus*, *Scirpus*, *Scleria*, and *Tricophorum*. This diversity of sedges in Delaware is primarily due to the diversity of habitat; from upland forests and coastal dunes, to tidal and nontidal wetlands and swamps.

The majority of sedges in Delaware are found growing in the Coastal Plain physiographic province, where over 100 species are restricted to this region. In contrast, just over 30 species are restricted to the Piedmont province. Several species of sedges in Delaware are not native to the state and some are considered to be invasive, such as the *Carex kobomugi* (Japanese sand sedge). When considering the overall natural distribution of sedges in the eastern U.S., a little over 60 species of sedges in Delaware are at or near their northern limits of distribution and just over 60 species of sedges in Delaware are at or near their southern limits. The sedge flora of Delaware is primarily perennial with just over 200 species, compared to a bit more than 20 species that are annuals.

About 50% of the sedge flora of Delaware is rare or uncommon. Over 100 species are considered to be rare or uncommon in the state and many are known from only a single occurrence or population. In addition, there are several species that are historical, meaning they have not been reported for 20 or more years. Furthermore, a few species are thought to be gone, or extirpated in the state. One species, *Rhynchospora knieskernii* (Knieskern's beak rush), is listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

There are several species of sedges that are available in the nursery trade and would make great additions to backyard ponds, or a poorly drained corner of ones property. Some of these species include: *Carex comosa* (bristly sedge), *Carex stricta* (tussock sedge), *Dulichium arundinaceum* (three-way sedge), *Eleocharis quadrangulata* (squarestem spike-rush), *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* (long-stem bulrush, synonym = *Scirpus validus*), and *Scirpus cyperinus* (cottongrass bulrush).

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