

VERSATILE AND UNDERUTILIZED SEDGES

Carex is easily our most diverse genus of native plants in the Midwest and many other temperate regions. The sheer number of species along with their confusing taxonomy means that many versatile species for restoration and landscaping remain virtually unknown. Inclusion of sedges in our restoration projects yields several important benefits, including competition for cool season weeds, early season cover for wildlife, and tolerance for the wide variations in soil moisture that are part of our changing climate. Three species that stand out for their adaptability to a variety of soil and hydrologic conditions include Field Oval Sedge (*Carex molesta*), Meadow Sedge (*Carex granularis*), and Yellow Fox Sedge (*Carex annectens* var *xanthocarpa*).



Field Oval Sedge (*Carex molesta*) is a common species of moist meadows, disturbed prairies, and shady depressions. This wide habitat variation is indicative of its adaptability. The foliage typically reaches about 12 inches in height while the seed heads may reach 2 feet. In restorations, it is well adapted to wet mesic prairies and forested wetland situations. In landscaping, it is an outstanding species for storm water practices, including vegetated swales and rain gardens. In infiltration practices, it will tolerate areas that pond for over 24 hours as well as areas that drain quickly. *Carex molesta* is very drought resistant.

Meadow Sedge (*Carex granularis*) is a low growing species that also occurs in a wide variety of plant communities. Like *Carex molesta*, it is most common in moist meadows, but also occurs in sedge meadows, open woods, fens, and streambanks. It is a low growing plant with broad bluish-green leaves that can reach up to 1 foot in length, but tend to sprawl out in a rosette rather than standing vertical. The rather inconspicuous inflorescence grows up to 18 inches long typically flopping over when the seed ripens. In a restoration, *Carex granularis* may be utilized in a wide variety of sunny to shady seed mixes in wet to mesic environments. In landscaping, *Carex granularis* makes an attractive groundcover when planted on 10" centers. It is also appropriate for storm water practices that drain in less than 24 hours. It makes an attractive low border for a rain garden.



Yellow Fox Sedge (*Carex annectens* var *xanthocarpa*) is a close relative of the widely distributed and well known Fox Sedge (*Carex vulpinoidea*). There are however, some notable differences in both appearance and adaptability. The yellow seed heads of *Carex annectens* var *xanthocarpa* reach about 30 inches in height, standing stiffly above the foliage in contrast to the shorter brown seed heads of *Carex vulpinoidea* that are mixed with the foliage. These conspicuous seed heads create an attractive ornamental appearance in early summer. Yellow Fox Sedge is native to sandy prairies and meadows that tend to dry out in the summer, making it one of our most drought tolerant wetland sedges. In a restoration, Yellow Fox Sedge is appropriate for mesic to wet prairie seed mixes. In landscaping, it is one of the best sedges for rain gardens due to its ornamental appearance and wide tolerance for both wet and dry conditions.