

## SEDGES TO INCLUDE IN PRAIRIE MIXES

While most people consider a prairie to be a mixture of grasses and wildflowers, sedges are present in all types of native prairie and are especially prominent in wet prairies. Like other prairie plants, moisture is the most important factor for determining which species may be appropriate for your restoration. Soil type is also an important consideration.

Dry sandy soil tends to favor low stature prairies, often with Little Bluestem as the dominant grass. Sedges that thrive in this environment include Sand-bracted Sedge (*Carex muhlenbergii*) and Plains Oval Sedge (*Carex brevior*). Both perform well in disturbed sandy soil. An important species of mesic to dry prairies on loamy soils is Prairie Oval Sedge (*Carex bicknellii*). This species also occurs on sand prairies. It establishes readily in a restoration from dormant sowing.

Sedge diversity increases in wet mesic prairies. Yellow Fox Sedge (*Carex annectens* var *xanthocarpa*) and Lance-fruited Oval Sedge (*Carex scoparia*) are 2 species that are particularly well adapted to this environment. Field Oval Sedge (*Carex molesta*) and Meadow Sedge (*Carex granularis*) also do well in wet mesic prairies, particularly in neutral to calcareous soils.

Wet prairies harbor the greatest diversity of sedges including the highly rhizomatous Woolly Sedge (*Carex pellita*). Along with the wet mesic species above, wet prairies are also home to the common wetland species Porcupine Sedge (*Carex hystericina*), Awl-fruited Sedge (*Carex stipata*), and Fox Sedge (*Carex vulpinoidea*). As the wet prairie grades into the even wetter sedge meadow, Tussock Sedge (*Carex stricta*) may become the dominant cover accompanied by a great diversity of other wetland species.

Most *Carex* species benefit from moist stratification, therefore dormant seed installation in the late fall and winter is far more effective at establishing sedges in a prairie than spring sowing. While the above species are some of the most common and commercially available species for restoration, a large variety of other *Carex* species may also be found in prairies.

## PLANT FEATURE: SILPHIUM TEREBINTHINACEUM (PRAIRIE DOCK)



Few forbs are more characteristic of the eastern tallgrass prairie than this prodigious plant. Native from the Ozarks east to Ohio, it inhabits nearly every classification of prairie within its natural range from marly prairie fens to the driest limestone glade. Its combination of huge spade-shaped basal leaves, tall smooth scapes and marble-shaped buds make it absolutely unmistakable in the field. The leaves can stand up to waist high, while the flower stalks may tower up to 10 feet in height. Like the closely related Compass Plant, it develops a massive taproot, often taking three or more years to bloom from seed. When mature, the tall scapes will produce dozens of 2 inch yellow sunflowers during a month long span in late summer, typically beginning near the end of July. The flowers produce a ring of meaty seeds with a kernel that looks and tastes like an annual sunflower, attracting goldfinches and other songbirds.

In the landscape, this spectacular plant may be used as a specimen in full sun, where it is sure elicit interest. In a restoration, it may be utilized in nearly any sunny terrestrial community within its range, but is particularly suitable in [mesic](#) and [wet mesic prairies](#).