

Native Plants for Erosion Control in Shady Areas

Shady slopes are one of the most challenging environments for establishment of vegetation. The lack of sunlight and the high risk of erosion and washout from increasingly common extreme rainfall events combine to heighten the risk of failure. Correct species selection, installation during the optimal season, and appropriate use of erosion control fabrics will provide the best chance for successful establishment in this difficult environment.

Graminoids (Grasses and Sedge) are the most effective plants for erosion control due to their dense fibrous root systems. For rapid establishment in shady areas, native wild ryes including Virginia Wild Rye (*Elymus virginicus*), Riverbank Wild Rye (*Elymus riparius*), and Silky Wild Rye (*Elymus villosus*) will produce the fastest cover. These wild ryes should not be used alone since they are not as deep-rooted or long-lived as other native graminoids. Longer lived species such as Beak Grass (*Diarrhena obovata*), Northern Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), and woodland sedges (*Carex spp*) should be utilized to complete the seed mix. Appropriate sedges for upland woodland environments include Burreed Sedge (*Carex sparganioides*), Davis Wood Sedge (*Carex davisii*), Meadow Sedge (*Carex granularis*), and Short-headed Bracted Sedge (*Carex cephalophora*). Common Oak Sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*) may also be utilized when installation is via plugs.

Seeding in shady situations is most effectively performed during the dormant season. Dormant sowing allows germination to occur early in the spring before the trees leaf out. Wild ryes will germinate as early as late March in central Indiana, allowing 4 or more weeks of growth before the tree leaves are fully developed. In contrast, if the seed mix is installed in May, the seedlings struggle in dense shade until October, greatly impeding their development.

All seeded and plugged installation on slopes should incorporate some type of erosion control fabric. A straw blanket in biodegradable coconut netting is ideal for this situation. Be certain the blanket is overlapped and stapled per the manufacturer's recommendations.

Plant Feature – Meadow Sedge (*Carex granularis*)

Meadow sedge is a one of our most ornamental and adaptable sedges. The broad bluish-green foliage is up to a foot long, but mostly grows outward rather than upward, creating a low ground cover. Meadow sedge occurs in a wide variety of habitats ranging from fens to moist meadows and open woodland. This adaptability makes it ideal for diverse landscape applications. Meadow sedge is suitable for exposures ranging from dappled shade to full sun in mesic to saturated soil conditions. It is excellent for mass planting as a groundcover, replacing typically invasive ground covers such as English Ivy, Vinca minor, and Euonymus fortunei.

Meadow sedge is also an excellent choice for rain gardens that drain in less than 24 hours after a rain event. Other rain garden species that mix well with meadow sedge include Tufted Hair Grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), Showy Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida var speciosa*), and Golden Alexanders (*Zizia aurea*). In a restoration, meadow sedge is appropriate for a variety of moist habitats with associates contained in our [Sedge Meadow Mix](#) or our [Forested Wetland Mix](#).

