

Sedges for Mass Plantings and Groundcovers

Although sedges are most commonly associated with wetlands, the exceptional diversity contained in the genus *Carex* assures a variety of species appropriate for nearly all site conditions. Included in this variety are many species with ornamental value for mass plantings and groundcovers. This installment will cover some of the best species for shaded environments.

Dry shade is often one of the most challenging environments for plant establishment. One of the best plants for these conditions is Common Oak Sedge or Penn Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*). Native to Oak-Hickory woodlands, it performs best in dappled shade that is not too dense. It prefers sandy or gravelly soil, but will grow in other soils provided they have good drainage. It spreads by rhizomes to form a sod. Its attractive fine foliage makes it one of the most popular sedges for mass planting. Another species that does well in dry shade is Short-headed Bracted Sedge (*Carex cephalophora*). It is a clump grower that has a spreading growth habit. Both species are low growing, with foliage typically peaking at 6-8" in height.

For moister areas, there are several attractive choices. Straight-styled Wood Sedge (*Carex radiata*) is an excellent fine-textured substitute for areas that are too moist for *Carex pensylvanica*. Unlike Penn Sedge, it does not spread by rhizomes. As a result, it should be installed on 8 to 10 inch centers. Palm Sedge (*Carex muskingumensis*) is an excellent choice for moist shade. Its dark green shiny foliage is clustered near the top of the 10 inch culms, resulting in its common name. It is native to wetlands, so it is an excellent plant for shady rain gardens as well. Another very appealing sedge for moist to wet shade is Brome Hummock Sedge (*Carex bromoides*). Its large clumps resemble Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) in form.

PLANT FEATURE: CAREX PENNSYLVANICA (COMMON OAK SEDGE)

As its common name implies, this is a sedge of dry oak-hickory woodlands and oak savannas where it often predominates the herbaceous layer. Its fine-textured medium green foliage make this plant an attractive groundcover in well-drained soil and filtered shade. An inconspicuous inflorescence is present in the spring. This species is a sporadic seed producer, instead focusing its reproduction vegetatively via rhizomes. Therefore, it is best established via plugs in both restorations and landscaping. When used as a groundcover in landscape settings, they should be spaced on 12 inch centers. In a restoration it may be used with associates in our [Upland Woodland Mix](#).

