

February 2020 Plant of the Month



Carex lurida Wahlenb., ShallowSedge

February 2020 Plant of the Month is probably New Jersey most abundant sedge, the shallow sedge. As a member of the Cyperaceae, this plant is distinguished from grasses and rushes by its anatomical differences in stem architecture and seed structure. Mary Hough (1983) identifies voucher specimens have been collected for this species in every county except Cumberland. I personally can attest shallow sedge exists in Cumberland, because I have observed it often on field outings within that county. Fernald (1950) describes this sedge as one of Northeast North America's most common species.

Carex lurida is one of New Jersey many sedges. Our highly variable terrain, across five physiographic provinces provide an unusual suite of xeric to aquatic habitats, and sedges occupy nearly every one. *Carex lurida* is differentiated from its many relatives by its appearance within its tribe, and the placement of the males flower spike above the female spikes.

Sedge use for food, fiber, and fuel have a long historic and pre-historic record. It is assumed shallow sedge would have similar uses by Native Americans. There are no ethnological records for its use; primarily many Native Americans may not have differentiated this species from the myriad of similar species found in the North East.

JRA, 2/2020