

August 2021 Plant of the Month



Carex tribuloides Wahlenberg., Blunt Broom Sedge

The August *Plant of the Month* is a member of the sedge family, Cyperaceae, and one of the numerous species within the genus *Carex*. Modern nomenclatural experts classify the species with two varieties: var. *tribuloides* and var. *sangamonensis*. New Jersey's specimens fall within the definition of the typical variety, whereas the var. *sangamonensis* is distributed in the mid-western states as far south as Veracruz, Mexico. The species is widely distributed east of the Mississippi River in rich floodplain wetlands, wet grasslands, ditches, stream banks, and wet thickets (FNA, Vol. 23, pp 363, 2002). Mary Hough (1983) documented the species throughout New Jersey, specifically "through North Jersey, the Inner Coastal Plain, and the Delaware Bay area." The species is absent within the Pinelands. Our species on the month is an obligate wetland plant commonly seen in New Jersey along stream banks, lakeshores, and wet meadows.

Carex tribuloides is a member of the Cyperaceae, and is classified within the Linneaus section Ouales. Dr. Anton Reznicek, the Curator Emeritus of the University of Michigan Herbarium, describes the section as complex and difficult to identify. The section is the largest group of sedges, genus *Carex*, in North America (FNA, 2002). New Jersey's flora supports many of the members of section Ouales, providing our botanists identification challenges throughout all of our many ecological diverse habitats. Our species is differentiated from the other members of the section by its coarse growing habit, the dense cluster of spikes, with a distinct elongated achene.

The genus *Carex* was used by Native American for a variety of uses, such as fiber for baskets and mats. The genus was also used for a variety of medicines (Moerman, 1998). The best time to identify *Carex tribuloides* is when the achenes are ripe and mature. For New Jersey that could be anywhere between late June and late August, depending on the specimens conditions and the yearly rainfall. The plant is visible now throughout our Coastal Plain.