

July 2022 Plant of the Month



Carex crinita Lamark. Fringed Sedge sensu lato

July's *Plant of the Month* provides a record of widespread native sedge that is represented in New Jersey by two distinct growth forms or varieties: *Carex crinita* v. *crinita* (typical) and *Carex crinita* v. *brevicrinis*. The photo for this Month's posting is *Carex crinita* v. *brevicrinis* taken on the edge of Elmer Lake, Salem County. The species is found State-wide, but the variety *brevicrinis* favor the Pine Barren and Outer Coastal Plain habitats. Both varieties are obligate wetland species, and are each associated with open stream edges, lakes shoreline, and open marshes. Fringed sedge is a member of the sedge family, the Cyperaceae.

Fringed sedge is easily recognized by its pendulous spikes, but is less easily identified to a specific taxon because of sympatry with each variety, and overlapping distribution with species in the same taxonomic group. *Carex crinita* v. *crinita* has variable constricted achenes, whereas *Carex crinita* v. *brevicrinis* has no constrictions, and are broadly obovoid (FNA, V 23, p386). *Carex mitchelliana*, Mitchell's sedge, is a more delicate Pine Barren species within the same genetic clade. It overlaps with the Plant of the Month within the Outer Coastal Plain and Pine Barrens habitats. *Carex gynandra*, the nodding sedge, overlaps with the Plant of the Month in the northern counties. Where these plants co-exist, gene flow and hybridization may be possible.

The fringed sedge produces large quantities of achenes that are a food source for granivorous birds and small rodents. Moerman (1998) does not list a use for the Plant of the Month, although other sedges are specified as medicine or fiber. It is somewhat puzzling the use of the achenes is not described in the literature. As hunter-gathering archaic and woodland people crossed the State I have no doubt the small grains were harvested and added to the day's seed harvest. Early American may not have had a specific name for this seed. As a seasoned archaeologist once told me, while in the far north of Labrador, he came upon a group of Native American children picking blueberries. Interested in the names people apply to certain foods, he asked inquisitively what they called the fruits. They said they call them "*berries*." Maybe that was the way they classified these achenes: "*seeds*."

The fringed sedge is now in fruit and will persist for a few more weeks. Search lake edges, stream banks and open wet ditches for this interesting sedge.