



Maine Department of Conservation  
Natural Areas Program

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*Carex sterilis* Willd.

**Dioecious Sedge**

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**Habitat:** Wet calcareous soils. [Non-tidal rivershore (non-forested, seasonally wet); Open wetland, not coastal nor rivershore (non-forested, wetland)]

**Range:** Newfoundland to Minnesota, south to Pennsylvania and west to Illinois.

**Phenology:** Fruits June - August.

**Family:** Cyperaceae

**Aids to Identification:** Identification of the species of *Carex* is usually very difficult and relies on technical morphological features. *Carex sterilis* belongs to the section *Stellulate*, a group that is characterized by gynecaudrous spikes (pollen bearing flowers borne at the base of the spike), sharp margined (but not wing margined) perigynia with a thick, spongy base. *Carex sterilis* is identified by its subdioecious habit. All other members of the *Stellulate* will show reproductive stems that produce both pollen bearing flowers and ovule bearing flowers (termed monoecious). *Carex sterilis*, on the other hand, produces these two types of flowers on separate stems (though each type of plant may have a few of the other type present). Its specific epithet, *sterilis*, refers to the pollen bearing stems which will not produce seeds (i.e., sterile).

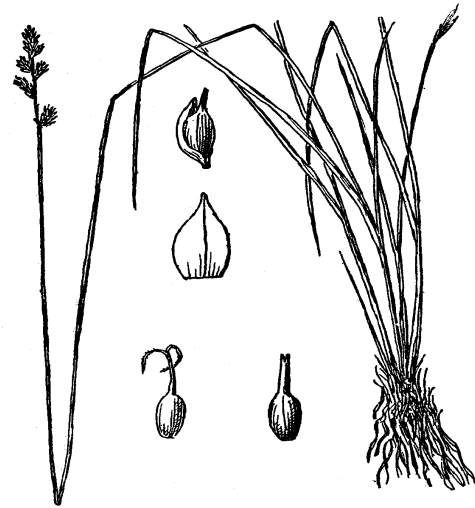


Illustration from Britton & Brown's Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada, 2nd ed.

**Ecological characteristics:** In Maine this sedge has been found growing along gravelly rivershores (riverside seep community) and in circumneutral (calcareous) fens.

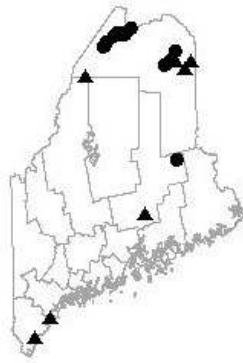
**Synonyms:** Formerly referred to as *Carex elachycarpa* Fern., *Carex muricata* L. var. *sterilis* (Fern.) Gleason.

**Rarity of *Carex sterilis***

<b>State Rank:</b>	S3	Rare in Maine.
<b>New England Rank:</b>	Division 2	Regionally rare plant: Fewer than 20 current (seen since 1970) occurrences within New England.
<b>Global Rank:</b>	G4	Widespread, abundant, and apparently secure globally, but with cause for long-term concern.

**Status of *Carex sterilis***

<b>Federal Status:</b>	None	No Federal Status.
<b>State Status:</b>	Special Concern	



- ▲ Historical (before 1982)  
● Recent (1982 - present)

### Known Distribution in Maine:

This rare plant has been documented from a total of 16 town(s) in the following county(ies): Aroostook, Cumberland, Penobscot.

**Dates of documented observations are:** 1896, 1902, 1935, 1936, 1946, 1967, 1985, 1989, 1997, 2000, 2001 (13)

### Reason(s) for rarity:

Suitable calcareous habitat is scarce.

### Conservation considerations:

Maintain hydrologic integrity of wetland and rivershore habitat.

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The information in this fact sheet was downloaded from the Natural Areas Program's Biological and Conservation Database on 12 MAY 2004. We are grateful to our Botanical Advisory Group for additional information on particular species, and in particular, to Arthur Haines for his assistance with identifying characteristics and taxonomic questions. Nomenclature follows Haines and Vining's *Flora of Maine* (V.F. Thomas Press, 1998); where older works refer to a plant by another name, it is given under "Synonyms". The Natural Areas Program, within the Department of Conservation, maintains the most comprehensive source of information on Maine's rare or endangered plants and rare or exemplary natural communities, and is a member of the Association for Biodiversity Information.

If you know of locations for this plant or would like more information on this species,  
please contact the Natural Areas Program  
State House Station 93, Augusta, Maine 04333; telephone (207) 287-8044.

