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Technical Report

Wetland Flora



No. 97-8 / November 1997

Gene Silberhorn

Cattail Sedge

Carex typhina Michx.

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

This perennial, grasslike plant is a member of the sedge family (Cyperaceae). The culm (stem) is erect (.3 to 1 meter tall), sharply angled and bears a terminal, compact reproductive spike of fruits by early summer. The spike of many fruits is green in summer and turns tan in autumn. The terminal cone-like structure is characteristic only in this species and *Carex squarrosa*, a closely related species of this genus. The terminal head is made up of many individual nutlets (minute dry nut) that are each surrounded by a membranous, sac-like structure called a perigynum (typical of this genus). The perigynum of this species is shaped like a miniature amphora. The long, narrow, strap-like leaves often exceed the length of the plant. The common name "cattail" sedge would suggest that this plant resembles cattails (*Typha*). The only remote resemblance is perhaps the reproductive spike and that of the "wiener-on-a-stick" fruiting head of cattails. Nomenclature is sometimes puzzling and begs for imagination.

Distribution

Carex typhina is mainly an eastern wetland sedge ranging from eastern Canada to the Gulf Coast.

Habitat

Cattail sedge is infrequent in forested wetlands and when found it occurs only in small clumps of a few individual plants. It usually does not form dense, matted areas typical of sedge meadows. In Virginia, it is most frequently found in wooded riverine wetlands of the Chowan (Blackwater and Nottoway rivers) and James River Watersheds.

Ecological Values/Benefits

Seeds of this genus are good food sources for waterfowl, small mammals and song birds.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Revision of The National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Carex typhina* is classified **facultative wetland plant (FACW)**. FACW plants "usually occur in wetlands (estimated probability 67%-99%)."

Carex typhina Michx.



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