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Technical Report



Wetland Flora

No. 02-1 / January 2002

Gene Silberhorn

Bultongue

Sagittaria lancifolia L. ≡ *Sagittaria falcata* Pursh

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Bultongue is a fleshy-leaved, emergent wetland plant with showy white, crepe-like flowers. The leaves are distinctly erect, and lance-shaped, as the specific name implies. The plant is usually found emerging from standing water or exposed if at low tide in a tidal freshwater marsh. The leaves come up from underground (usually soft mud) rhizomes and range from one to three feet tall. The reproductive part of the plant is a separate stalk (scape) supporting a series of three petaled flowers often occurring in clusters of three at a node. *Sagittaria lancifolia* occasionally occurs with a closely related species, arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*) (Wetland Flora 91-1 / March 1991). Unlike arrowhead, bultongue's leaves are lance-shaped and not triangular or arrowhead-shaped. The flowering scapes however are very similar. The scape of bultongue is usually taller than the leaves, ranging from 1.5 to 4.0 feet tall. *S. lancifolia* does not produce underground tubers ("duck potato"), typical of arrowhead.

Distribution

Sagittaria lancifolia is a southern, mainly coastal plant ranging from Delaware to Florida, west to Texas and Mexico and south to the West Indies and Central America. It is particularly common in the Mississippi Delta.

Habitat

This fleshy emergent is more likely to occur in tidal freshwater marshes in the Mid-Atlantic and the coastal southeast than any other wetland type. It appears that its preferred habitat is the intertidal zone (between mean sea level and mean high water) in tidal rivers and tributaries where salinity does not occur over 0.5 ppt over the growing season. *S. lancifolia* is frequently associated with arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*) (Wetland Flora No. 90 - 6 / November 1990) and pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) (Wetland Flora No. 01-5 / May 2001).

Ecological Value/Benefits

Specifically, the main wildlife value of this species are the dry, flat seeds, a good waterfowl food. Also the dense stands of emergents such as bultongue, arrow arum, pickerelweed and others affords cover for both aquatic and land-based wildlife. Holistically, the entire ecosystem of tidal wetlands is a primary spawning and nursery area for anadromous fishes and a larder for waterfowl.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Revision of the National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Sagittaria lancifolia* is classified as an **obligate wetland plant (OBL)**. OBLs are plants that almost always occur in wetlands (> 99% probability).

Author's Note: Bultongue was first published more than nine years ago (No.92 - 7 / July 1992) in black and white. It is repeated this month because of Kent Forrest's colorful rendition of this plant, but also because it now has a new scientific name. Keeping current is good even in retirement.

Sagittaria lancifolia L. ≡ *Sagittaria falcata* Pursh -----



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Illustration by
Kent Forrest

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