

# Porcupine sedge (*Carex hystericina*)

## Family: Sedge (*Cyperaceae*)

**DESCRIPTION:** Porcupine sedge, AKA bristly sedge or long-hair sedge, is a large, clump-forming native perennial adapted to wet or consistently moist soils. It's found in shallow marshes, along wetland margins, in floating mats, bogs, shorelines, ditches and calcareous fens. Widespread across North America, it's found in all but 13 Minnesota counties. The flowers that bloom in May and June produce tan achenes in July and August.

**USES:** Attractive, soil-stabilizing clumps make the plant well-suited for shoreline or wetland restorations. Because it tolerates fluctuating water levels, it's ideal for high-volume rain gardens. Insects and a wide range of bird species eat the achenes.

### REFERENCES:

[MPCA: Plants for Stormwater Design](#)  
[Friends of the Wildflower Garden](#)  
[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** Bristly sedge (*Carex comosa*) has more tightly packed perigynia. Lake sedge (*Carex lacustris*) grows up to 4 feet tall; its blue-green leaves have a reddish to purple base. Beaked sedge's (*Carex rostrata*) leaves are more blue-green, and appear U-shaped in cross-section.



**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** GP, MW and NCNE: OBL

**ID:** Porcupine sedge grows up to 3 feet tall. Viewed in cross-section, the basal leaves are M-shaped. Rough on the underside, leaves grow one-eighth-inch to three-eighths-inch wide. The leaf stalks are triangular in cross-section. Sheaths are reddish purple to yellow-green. The inflorescence consists of one terminal staminate (male) flower spike above two or three pistillate (female) flower spikes, which have clusters of densely packed perigynia (the vase-shaped casing that surrounds the achenes) arranged in a cylinder shape.

## Planting Recommendations

Porcupine sedge prefers full sun but tolerates partial sun. Planting plugs 18 inches apart allows the clumps to grow together. Young plants require frequent watering. Broadcasting seed on the soil surface in fall allows seeds to break dormancy over the winter. The species can tolerate being underwater for three days at depths up to 36 inches, but it prefers

depths of 6 inches or less. Young plants are more susceptible to flooding; consider using larger specimens in stormwater plantings where fluctuations are expected right away. Good choices for companion plants include dark green bulrush, woolgrass, bluejoint grass, marsh milkweed, common boneset and monkey flower.

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