



Carex Prove to be Problem-Solving Perennials for the Home Landscape

Results are in from Mt. Cuba Center's latest trial garden research on *Carex*.

(Hockessin, Delaware—January 17, 2023)—According to a four-year trial conducted by Mt. Cuba Center in Hockessin, Delaware, *Carex*, also known as sedges, are one of the most effective and versatile problem-solving plants for home gardens.

The trial evaluated 70 types of *Carex* including 65 species and five cultivars native to the mid-Atlantic region. Results are available now in the new report, [Carex for the Mid-Atlantic Region](#). *Carex* can be found in a wide range of habitats and provide food and shelter for wildlife, as well as being a sustainable alternative to traditional turfgrass lawns.

Sam Hoadley, Mt. Cuba's manager of horticultural research, ranked the species and cultivars based on plant vigor and foliage quality in both sun and shade locations. *Carex woodii*, or Wood's sedge, was the top performer in the trial, demonstrating the genus's ornamental value and versatility in the garden. It excels in both sun and shade and offers a carpet of straw-colored flowers from April to May.

"*Carex* are quickly becoming favored by homeowners and horticulturists alike, thanks to their beauty, utility, and overall minimal maintenance requirements," explains Hoadley. "The diversity of the genus is outmatched only by the wide spectrum of habits in which they grow—from shady wetlands to coastal dunes, you can find a *Carex* to grow and thrive there."

Hoadley adds that not only do *Carex* provide food and shelter for wildlife, but they also proved to be an option for those looking to replace their lawn with a more sustainable option.

"How many perennial genera have members that we can recommend as successful and mowable replacements for traditional turfgrass lawns? That aspect alone pulls *Carex* into the long-term sustainability conversation," he says.

Key Takeaways:

- *Carex woodii*, or Wood's sedge, was the trial's top performer and exemplified the genus's ornamental value and versatility in the garden. Although similar to *C. pensylvanica* in its low-growing, slow-spreading habit, *C. woodii* forms a denser mat of foliage, and is therefore, superior to suppressing weeds. It excels in both sun and shade locations and offers a carpet of straw-colored flowers from April through May.
- The trial's top-performing species and cultivars thrive in average soils; i.e., their trial conditions were not considered too moist or too dry. But do not dismiss those without high marks as "underperformers." These may, in fact, excel in landscapes with differing soil types. Those considering *Carex* species in their landscapes are encouraged to consult the "*Carex* for Dry Soils" and "*Carex* for Moist-to-Wet Soils" charts in the research report.



- The *Carex* trials included a yearlong mowing component and found a vast majority of types trialed were tolerant of regular mowing. Small- to medium-sized *Carex* with fine-textured foliage gave the aesthetic most closely associated with that of a traditional lawn. Those species with horizontally growing underground roots show potential to fill in gaps within a lawn, as well as require fewer plants when installing a *Carex* lawn from scratch. *C. woodii*, the trial's top-performing *Carex*, is also the trial's top-performing mowable sedge. Find the other top mowable sedges listed in the research report.
- While most *Carex* are wind-pollinated with little value for pollinators, *Carex* provide for other wildlife in a variety of ways. The seeds of *Carex* are eaten by mammals and birds and the leaves of *Carex* are consumed by caterpillars of numerous species of butterflies and moths. In some cases, the *Carex* themselves are the habitat, providing refuge for a diversity of organisms, both in home gardens and in the wild. Mt. Cuba is working with the state of Delaware to help expand suitable bog turtle habitats, and *C. stricta* is playing an important role as part of the turtles' habitat.

This research report details Mt. Cuba's top 16 *Carex* performers. Descriptions of all 70 plants included in the trial are available at mtcubacenter.org/trial.

Mt. Cuba's Top-Performing *Carex*:

<i>Carex woodii</i> (Wood's Sedge)	<i>Carex muskingumensis</i> 'Little Midge'
<i>Carex cherokeensis</i> (Cherokee Sedge)	(Little Midge Muskingum Sedge)
<i>Carex bromoides</i> (Common Brome Sedge)	<i>Carex albicans</i> (White-Tinge Sedge)
<i>Carex haydenii</i> (Hayden's Sedge)	<i>Carex jamesii</i> (James' Sedge)
<i>Carex stricta</i> (Upright Sedge)	<i>Carex muskingumensis</i> 'Oehme' (Oehme
<i>Carex emoryi</i> (Emory's Sedge)	Muskingum Sedge)
<i>Carex sprengelii</i> (Long-Beaked Sedge)	<i>Carex crinita</i> (Fringed Sedge)
<i>Carex pennsylvanica</i> (Pennsylvania Sedge)	<i>Carex leavenworthii</i> (Leavenworth's
<i>Carex pennsylvanica</i> 'Straw Hat' (Straw	Sedge)
Hat Pennsylvania Sedge)	<i>Carex plantaginea</i> (Plantain-leaf Sedge)

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About Mt. Cuba Center

Mt. Cuba Center is a botanic garden that highlights the beauty and value of native plants to inspire conservation. Once the private estate of Pamela and Lammot du Pont Copeland, the public garden opened for general admission in 2013 and now spans more than 1,000 acres in northern Delaware. It features captivating formal and naturalistic gardens, picturesque meadows and ponds with stunning vistas, and more than two miles of scenic trails throughout its natural lands. Mt. Cuba is a leader in native plant research and open space preservation, having protected more than 13,000 acres in the mid-Atlantic region. In recent years, the nonprofit garden received numerous awards and accolades including USA Today's 10Best Awards "Best Botanical Garden in North America" and Delaware Today's Best of Delaware Awards for "Best Place to Experience Nature" and "Best Workshops" for its gardening, conservation, art, and wellness classes. Learn more at mtcubacenter.org.