

## Habitat and Wildlife Value of Common Emergent Plant Species

“Emergent” species typically grow up out of standing water in wetlands and wet meadows, and along shorelines. Recently, some experienced installers have found greater success planting emergents in the spring, although high water levels may restrict the times when inundated sites can be planted.

**Slough sedge (*Carex obnupta*)** – Unusual for sedges in our area, slough sedge is the only wetland sedge that thrives in deep shade as well as full sun, and tolerates a wide range of freshwater hydrologic conditions, making it especially well suited for rain gardens. Typical associated species include water parsley, skunk cabbage and salmonberry. The evergreen foliage provides year-round habitat. Shore birds, waterfowl and song birds eat the seeds and employ the leaves for nesting material. Small animals such as turtles and muskrats take shelter in the thick foliage. Some amphibian species attach their egg cases to the stems. Slough sedge may grow up to 60” tall, with long, fleshy rhizomes.

**Tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*)** – Tufted hairgrass occurs commonly on hummocks in brackish water, and occasionally in freshwater wetlands. It tolerates occasional drying but not year-round flooding. The mounding habit of this species provides nesting sites for birds, and shelter for small animals. Tufted hairgrass supplies food for the larvae of several North American butterfly species. Growing up to 5’ tall with dense foliage, tufted hairgrass provides an excellent perch for birds, and grazing for large mammals. This species also occurs on lakeshores and is a keystone species for wet prairies of the Willamette Valley.

**Common spikerush (*Eleocharis palustris*)** – Common spikerush tolerates full sun, and grows in shallow freshwater wetlands from the coast up to montane regions. It spreads on rhizomes and grows in closely spaced small clusters up to 40” tall. Large mammals and geese graze heavily on the tops. Ducks eat the seeds and tubers and use the foliage for nesting, and insects and small birds perch on the stems. Small mammals use stands of spikerush for shelter. Hardstem bulrush (*Schoenoplectus acutus*) is sometimes associated with common spikerush.

**Daggerleaf rush (*Juncus ensifolius*)** – Daggerleaf rush grows best on moist sites, near but not in standing water, in full sun to partial shade. Muskrats eat the roots, and a wide variety of shore birds and waterfowl feed on the seeds of this plant. Waterfowl use the leaves for nesting material. Daggerleaf rush tolerates somewhat compacted soils, and may spread rapidly along disturbed shorelines. Clumps of daggerleaf rush arise from long, fat rhizomes, often growing in a relatively straight line, especially along lake shores. Daggerleaf rush grows to a height of 24”.

**Hardstem bulrush (*Schoenoplectus acutus*)** – Hardstem bulrush grows in deeper water than any other species we carry, tolerating over a foot of freshwater inundation in winter. This stout species can form large colonies and will grow up to 10’ tall. Muskrats and beaver eat the rhizomes and shoots, and muskrats use the stems for lodge building. Waterfowl eat the seeds and use the dense colonies for nesting cover. Amphibians attach their egg cases to the stems. You may want to consider planting hardstem bulrush instead of common cattails (*Typha latifolia*), because cattails spread more aggressively and often displace or exclude other native species, especially in small ponds and isolated wetlands.