



Rare and Unusual Plants of City Park, Warwick, RI

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January 2011

WARWICK'S CITY PARK which is located in the Buttonwoods section of Warwick contains unique natural habitats for several rare and unusual plants. The sandy soil in the park supports a natural community of Pitch Pine and Scrub Oak which provides ideal habitat for several species of milkweeds, grasses and other rare native plants.

At least eight species of plants included on the RI Rare Plant List are found in the park. One species of grass is native to the prairies and, to my knowledge, has not been documented in the literature as occurring in New England

Preservation of the park's fields and woods is necessary to maintain the habitat for these plants. Any bulldozing or other construction activities should take into account the presence of these rare plants. It would be desirable for the staff as well as for the Warwick Conservation Committee to learn the locations of these sensitive areas. One population of a rare milkweed species was destroyed by bulldozing a few years ago.

On the following pages is a list of the rare and unusual species which grow in the park.



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Artemisia campestris ssp. caudata

Tall Wormwood

This is a biennial which forms rosettes of basal leaves in the first year and blooms in the second year of growth when it forms a long panicle of inconspicuous flowers. This species is found near sandy beaches as it is in City Park This species can occasionally be found in sandy waste places.

Tall Wormwood is on the RI rare plant list.



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Asclepias amplexicaulis

Blunt-leaved or Sand Milkweed

Leaves clasp the stem.. Often found in dry, sandy soil. Grows to three feet tall. It blooms in July and is a favorite nectar source for many species of butterflies including Edwards' Hairstreak. There are very few plants of Blunt-leaved Milkweed in City Park.

*Blunt-leaved Milkweed
is rare in RI.*



Photo Credit: © 2003 Jeff Abbas

Asclepias exaltata

Poke Milkweed

It is often found in rich woods. It blooms in July with white flowers and stands two to four feet tall. There is one small population in the park.

Poke Milkweed is rare in RI.



Asclepias tuberosa

Butterfly Weed

Butterfly Weed is different from other species of Milkweed in that it has alternate leaves, no milky latex and orange flowers. It grows two to three feet tall and starts blooming in July.

Butterfly Weed is rare in RI.



Asclepias verticillata

Whorled Milkweed

This milkweed is found in sand plain communities such as City Park. William W. Bailey mentions this plant in his book “Among RI Wildflowers” as growing in Buttonwoods. It has linear leaves arranged in whorls around the stem and white flowers which bloom in late July and August. The only population in City Park was destroyed by bulldozing in 2007.

Whorled Milkweed is rare in RI.



Hudsonia tomentosa

Beach Heath

This is a small shrubby plant which resembles heath. It blooms in June with showy yellow flowers. It is unusual to find this plant in this part of RI. It is more commonly found on beaches in the southern part of the state. There are only a few plants in the park.

Beach Heath is not on the RI rare plant list



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Maianthemum stellatum

Starry False Solomon's Seal
Starry False Solomon's Seal is a small, single-stemmed, upright plant bearing a group of small white flowers at the end of the stem. The fruit is a green berry with purple stripes. The berry turns blue when ripe.

*It is not on the
RI rare plant list.*



9

Pityopsis falcata

Sickle-leaved Golden Aster

This plant has a restricted range and occurs in only six states along the eastern seaboard of the United States. It begins blooming in July with golden-yellow flowers and continues throughout the summer. This is one of the showiest of the rare plants in City Park.

Sickle-leaved Golden Aster is on the RI rare plant list.



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Quercus prinoides

Dwarf Chestnut Oak

This is a shrub growing about two to four feet tall. As with common White Oak, the leaves have rounded lobes without bristle tips. It is usually quite short , two to four feet, but may grow much taller. It is usually found in sandy woods such as those at City Park.

It is on the RI Rare plant list.



Photo Credit: Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Inc.

Sorghastrum nutans

Indian Grass

This is a tall plant growing up to six feet or more. Its flowers turn a brilliant golden-brown color in the fall. There is only one small population in City Park which is west of the main road into the park and NW of the small parking area.

Indian Grass is on the RI rare plant list.



*Photo credits:
Mike Haddock, www.kswildflower.org*



Calamovilfa longifolia

Prairie Sandreed

Native to the sandy soils and prairies of the Midwest, this grass somehow found its way to City Park where it grows alongside the Indian Grass. According to USDA it has not been reported from any New England states.

*I can't find any record
of its occurrence in
New England.*



Ambrosia psilostachya

Cuman or Western Ragweed

The United States Department of Agriculture says this plant is native to all but seven states in the U.S. It is not native to Rhode Island. The Flora of North America says it hybridizes with Common Ragweed.

This is an unusual plant which has become naturalized in City Park.

This article originally appeared at
among-ri-wildflowers.org
as an Amateur Botanist article