



Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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GUIDELINES FOR RARE PLANT COLLECTING IN MASSACHUSETTS

1. Be aware of the “Massachusetts Endangered Species Act” (Mass. General Law, Chapter 131A), its regulations (321 CMR 10:00), and what species occur on the current regulatory list of endangered, threatened and special concern species (321 CMR 10:60). It is necessary to have a permit from the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) to collect State protected species, including any seeds, fruits or other plant parts.
2. Obtain a necessary collecting permit from the State Botanist at the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife’s Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) or on line at: www.nhesp.org. Permits may be issued for certain scientific, educational or conservation purposes.
3. Even when permitted, collect only when it is important to do so for scientific, educational or conservation purposes. For instance, collecting one or a few plants to document a new state, county, town or site record is more justifiable than taking one or more additional specimens from a previously documented area. If you are doing a botanical survey, consult with the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP Botanist or Database Manager) to determine what rare plant species are already known from the survey area. Release of site specific location information is restricted and is only provided when justification is presented in writing, but lists of rare species known for each town are available on the web (www.nhesp.org). Besides these Guidelines, we advise all researchers to follow the “Guidelines for Ethical Field Research on Rare Plant Species” prepared by Dr. Elizabeth Farnsworth for the New England Wild Flower Society (<http://www.newfs.org/consERVE/rareplants.htm#guide>).
4. Collect a whole plant only if there are **>100 individuals** in the population. For herbarium vouchers this should be done when the plant’s identity is most apparent, e.g., when the plant is in flower or fruit. If more than one individual is needed, the number requested should correspond to the population’s ability to sustain the taking without causing a detectable decrease in its size or area during subsequent years. **If collecting seeds, collect no more than 10% of the seed present and collect from less than 20% of the individuals or fruits present in the population. Also, be sure to collect at a time when the seeds are mature.**
5. When numbers range from **10--100 individuals**, take only a diagnostic portion of the plant, such as a flowering or fruiting branch, to document an important occurrence not previously vouchered. The rarer the species and/or the smaller the population, the more conservative you should be in sampling. In many cases, a single leaf, flower or fruit, especially when accompanied by a good photograph or two, will be adequate proof of identification. **If collecting seed or other propagules, collect from less than 7.5% of the plants and less than**

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10% of the individuals present. When taking tissue samples from small populations, sampling should be designed to minimize the likelihood of any mortality to individual plants.

6. When numbers are **less than 10**, take photographs to document the species presence. **If participating in an approved recovery or restoration project, taking seed or other propagules may be justifiable, but taking <5% of the seed is recommended unless imminent threats or other special circumstances have convinced the plan preparers and reviewers that more is appropriate and permitted by DFW.**

7. Be sure to file a complete report detailing all collection activity (including a listing of all species taken, number of specimens taken of each, and the disposition of same) at the termination of the permit period with the Division's Permit Office and NHESP. Submission of "Rare Plant Observation Forms" with updates on any rare plant populations observed or sought, and copies of any research reports or publications associated with the permitted activities should be sent to the Database Manager at the NHESP address in Westborough. These reports are some of the key benefits to the Commonwealth resulting from permitted activities.

8. To obtain 1) lists of rare plants for Massachusetts or for a particular town, 2) Rare Plant Observation Forms (RPOF), 3) rare plant fact sheets, or 4) the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, consult the web page at www.nhesp.org. To access the RPOF directly, go to http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/rpof_2003.pdf. An electronic version that can be directly typed into is also available from NHESP Database Manager. For other botanical questions contact the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program at: Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, Rte. 135, North Dr., Westborough, MA 01581, or call the Program at 508/389-6360 (Administrative Assistant), 389-6368 (Database Manager) or 389-6344, 389-6382 (Botanists).

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