Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
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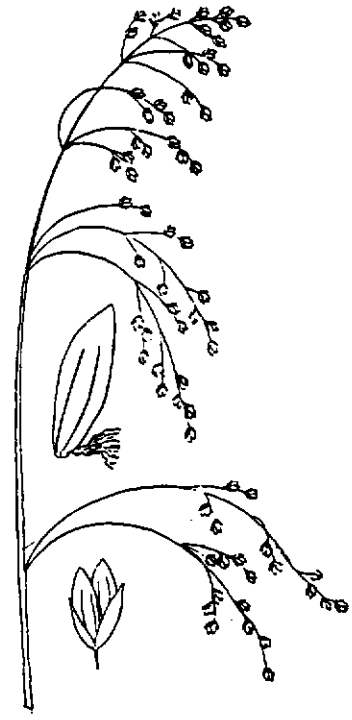
MASSACHUSETTS ENDANGERED PLANTS

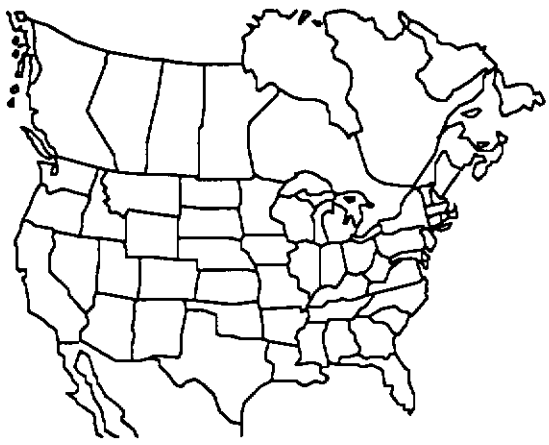
DROOPING SPEARGRASS
(*Poa languida* A.S. Hitchc.)



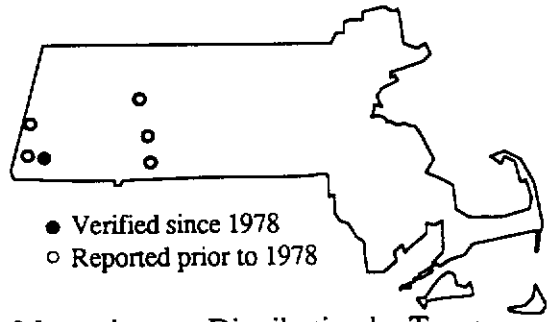
Gleason, H.A. The New Britton & Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.

Description

Drooping Speargrass is a 3-10 dm (1 - 3 1/2 ft.) tall, weak-stemmed member of the Grass family (Gramineae or Poaceae) that grows in loose clumps. Its soft blades are 2-4 mm (2/25 - 4/25 in.) wide. The sheaths--or lowermost, stem-enveloping portions of the blades--are hairless or nearly hairless. At the junction of the sheaths and the upper blades are 1-3 mm (1/25 - 3/25 in.) long "ligules" or membranous projections. Drooping Speargrass's flowers occur in a loose, somewhat nodding panicle (branched, elongate inflorescence) that is 5-10 cm (2 - 4 in.) in length. The branches of the panicle are few, and each branch has only a few spikelets (basic flowering unit of grasses) beyond its mid-point. The glumes, or outermost bracts of the spikelets, are topped by short points. The lemmas, or the bracts immediately above the glumes, are hairless except for a tuft of hairs at the base. Drooping Speargrass bears mature



Documented Range of Drooping Speargrass



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

spikelets from mid-May to late June.

Range

The range of Drooping Speargrass has been documented as extending from Newfoundland and Quebec to Minnesota, and south to Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Iowa.

Similar Species

Rough-stalked Meadow-grass (*P. trivialis*) could be confused with Drooping Speargrass. However, the ligules of its upper leaves are 5-8 mm (5/25 - 8/25 in.) long, compared to no more than 3 mm (3/25 in.) long in Drooping Speargrass.

Habitat in Massachusetts

In general, Drooping Speargrass is a plant of dry or rocky woods. In Massachusetts, its historical habitats (unverified since 1978) include a rich woods on a mountain slope; a deep, rich deciduous woods; and dry woods and clearings. Its current habitat (discovered in 1991) is a Hickory-Hop Hornbeam woodland. Associated trees at this site include White Pine (*Pinus strobus*), White Ash (*Fraxinus americanus*), Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), and Eastern Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). Herbs at the current habitat include Bristle-leaved Sedge (*Carex eburnea*), Robin's Plantain (*Erigeron pulchellus*), Early Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*), Three-lobed Violet (*Viola triloba* var. *dilatata*) and Round-lobed Hepatica (*Hepatica americana*). Among the rare Massachusetts plants at this habitat are Shining Wedgegrass (*Sphenopholis nitida*), Devil's-bit (*Chamaelirium luteum*), and Yellow Oak (*Quercus muhlenbergii*).

Population Status

Drooping Speargrass is presently listed as "Endangered" in Massachusetts. There are five historical sites (unverified since 1978) and one current site (discovered in 1991) in the Commonwealth. Drooping Speargrass is also considered rare in Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and Vermont. It was present historically in Maryland.