



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Oysterleaf *Mertensia maritima* (L.) Gray

State Status: **Endangered**
Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: Oysterleaf (*Mertensia maritima*) is a low-growing perennial wildflower of the Forget-Me-Not family (Boraginaceae), found in sandy coastal habitats such as beaches, spits, and foredunes of northern North America.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: Oysterleaf is a fleshy sprawling plant, up to 1 m (about 40 in.) in length, with a white waxy cast throughout. The leaves are opposite, succulent, egg- to spoon-shaped, and 2 to 6 cm (0.8–2.4 in.) in length. They have smooth margins and broad petioles. The flowers are borne in dense, leafy, axillary clusters, which can be very numerous. The petals are five-lobed and tube-shaped, and enclosed by much shorter, pointed sepals. The flowers, which begin to bloom in early summer, are first pinkish in color, and then become pale blue with maturity. The fruits of Oysterleaf are smooth, sharply angled nutlets, which mature July to September.

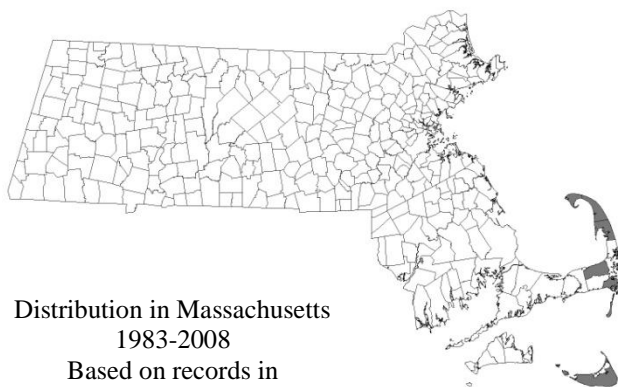
SIMILAR SPECIES: Oysterleaf does not closely resemble any other native plant species in Massachusetts.



HABITAT: Oysterleaf inhabits sparsely vegetated sandy coastal habitats, such as the upper reaches of beaches, sand spits, and foredunes. It is found above the wrack line but often within the reach of the highest tides. Because Oysterleaf grows in dynamic, high-stress habitats with shifting substrate, it requires large contiguous expanses of habitat to re-establish in the inevitable event of physical destruction by physical forces of nature.

Associated species in Massachusetts include Dune Grass (*Ammophila brevigulata*), Seaside Goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*), Beach Pea (*Lathyrus japonica*), Sea Rocket (*Cakile edentula*), Sea Milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*), and Seabeach Knotweed (*Polygonum glaucum*; Special Concern).

THREATS: Threats to Oysterleaf include any activities that reduce available habitat, or that result in trampling of vegetation and soil disturbance. Specifically, shoreline development and heavy recreational use of beaches greatly threaten this species. Pedestrian and over-sand vehicle traffic, and beach activities such as



Distribution in Massachusetts
1983-2008
Based on records in
Natural Heritage Database

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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digging, sunbathing, and beach sports can greatly disturb the vegetation and the soil.

RANGE: Oysterleaf is a northern species, known in North America from much of Canada, including the far northern territories, and from eastern New England; it is at the southern edge of its range in Massachusetts.

POPULATION IN MASSACHUSETTS: Oysterleaf is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Endangered. All listed species are legally protected from killing, collection, possession, or sale, and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. Oysterleaf is currently known from Barnstable and Nantucket Counties, and is historically known from Bristol County.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS: Over-sand vehicle and foot traffic should be excluded from Oysterleaf population locations to reduce the risk of damage to the rare plants and disturbance of the soil. Oysterleaf habitat can be roped off and posted with explanatory signage in a similar manner to what is commonly done to protect nesting shorebirds.

Population locations should be monitored regularly for invasion by exotic plant species such as Sea Poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) and Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) in the upper reaches of beaches and dune areas. If populations of exotic plants are discovered, they should be closely monitored, and plans for removal should be developed in consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program. All active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) is subject to review under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, and should be planned in close consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

Flowering and fruiting time in Massachusetts

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Updated 2015

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