



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

St. Andrew's Cross *Hypericum stragulum*

P. Adams & Robson

State Status: **Endangered**

Federal Status: **None**

DESCRIPTION: St. Andrew's Cross is a low shrub (up to 30 cm; 1 ft.) of the St. John's-wort family (Clusiaceae), known for its distinct flower shape. The four bright yellow petals make an oblique cross at the stem tips, which contrast against the dark green foliage. St. Andrew's Cross is often found in clumps in dappled sunlight and forest edges as a low ground cover. The woody stems are slender and reddish. The leaves are evergreen, opposite, and sessile, 1 to 3 cm in length; they are slightly waxy and narrowly oblong in shape, with smooth margins. Solitary yellow flowers bloom at the branch tips and uppermost axils in mid-summer, and are insect-pollinated. The flowers are small (8–11 mm), with narrow petals and numerous stamens. Once fertilized, the sepals enclose the swelling fruit. The emerging egg-shaped capsule contains many small round, black seeds. Seed capsules split open when mature. Dry seed capsules turn reddish brown and can remain on the plant through the winter.

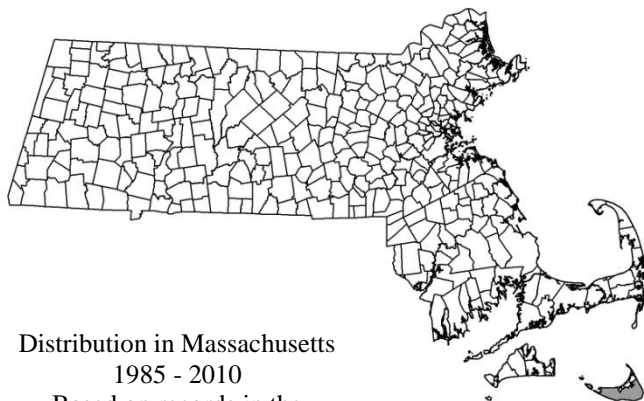


St. Andrew's Cross showing the four-lobed flowers on the left, and the clumped stems on the right. Photos: Bruce Sorrie, NHESP.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: St. Andrew's Cross is easily identifiable when in flower due to the oblique-cross shape of the petals. This species flowers throughout the summer.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The shrubby habit and unique flower shape distinguish this species from others in its genus.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS: In Massachusetts, St. Andrew's Cross inhabits dry, sandy soils of early succession, disturbed habitats near the coast. Known habitats in Massachusetts include path and woodland edges, open shrubby thickets, and the upland fringes of wetlands. St. Andrew's Cross requires full to filtered sunlight, and sometimes occupies canopy openings. It is frequently associated with Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), Bayberry (*Morella caroliniensis*), Lowbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*), Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Beaked Hazelnut (*Corylus*



Distribution in Massachusetts
1985 - 2010
Based on records in the
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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cornuta), Scrub Oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), Fox Grape (*Vitis labrusca*), and Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*).

RANGE: The range of St. Andrew’s Cross extends from Florida across the mid-Atlantic, north to Massachusetts and west to Texas. Massachusetts is at the northern part of its range.

POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS: St. Andrew’s Cross is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as Endangered. All listed species are protected from killing, collecting, possessing, or sale, and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. It is currently known only from Nantucket County.

THREATS: Habitat loss and succession are the major causes for decline of St. Andrew’s Cross. Slow germination rates may also be a major contributor to the status of this species.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS: This early succession species requires some level of disturbance to proliferate, and adequate sunlight. Mowing during dormancy has been shown to increase flower production and plant density. Path and forest edges where this species occurs may require active management to prevent over-shading by taller, more aggressive woody plants. 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 coordination with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program.

Flowering time in Massachusetts

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

REFERENCE:

Fernald, M.L. 1936. The varieties of *Ascyrum hypericoides*. *Rhodora* 38: 433.

Updated 2015

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