

Technical Report



Wetland Flora

No. 95-6 / September 1995

Gene Silberhorn

Swamp Rose

Rosa palustris Marsh

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Swamp rose is a thorny shrub with alternate, compound leaves that may grow to two meters tall. The pink, five petaled flowers are from 4 to 6cm wide and have yellow centers made up of a multitude of stamens. The fragrant blooms are usually solitary or in clusters of several flowers. Unlike the domesticated hybrid rose, this wild species does not have multiple petals of various colors. The compound leaves are made up of 7 to 9 leaflets. Each leaflet has serrated or tooth-like margins. Thorns are hooked or recurved and are often profuse on the stem. The fruit is commonly referred to as a hip and is usually reddish in color near the end of the growing season. The 5 prominent sepals (calyx) usually remain attached to the hip until after frost. Many minute dry seeds, called achenes are embedded within the hip. *Rosa palustris* spreads vegetatively by subterranean runners often producing a colony of clones of the parent plant. The only other shrubs that have thorns and alternate, compound leaves are blackberries, raspberries and dewberries belonging to the genus *Rubus*. These shrubs cannot be confused with swamp rose because they have white flowers and compound leaves with only three leaflets. *Rosa palustris* is recognizable in winter after leaf fall by its thorns and reddish hips.

Distribution

Rosa palustris ranges in wetlands throughout most of the eastern half of the United States from central Florida to the Maritime Provinces of Canada, west to the Great Lake States, and south to the Gulf of Mexico.

Habitat

Swamp rose may be found in several different types of wetland habitats, including tidal freshwater marshes and swamps, nontidal marshes, scrub/shrub and forested wetlands, and the margins of lakes and ponds. *Rosa palustris* is common in tupelo/cypress swamps, adapted to flooded conditions, and is often associated with other hydrophytic shrubs such as button bush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (Wetland Flora, No. 94-10 / November 1994), alder, *Alnus serrulata* (Wetland Flora, No. 95-5 / July 1995) and Virginia willow, *Itea virginica*.

Ecological Value / Benefits

Rose hips provide food for wildlife through winter and into the following year; although preferred food is fleshy fruited shrubs such as elderberry (Wetland Flora, No. 95-3 / March 1995), spice bush (Wetland Flora, No. 94-5 / July 1994), paw paw (Wetland Flora, No. 93-12 / November 1993), blueberry and others.

Hydrophytic Factor / Wetland Indicator Status

As listed in the *National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands: Virginia 1988*, *Rosa palustris* is classified as an **obligate wetland plant (OBL)**. OBLs are plants that almost always occur in wetlands (99% probability).

Rosa palustris Marsh



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