



## Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

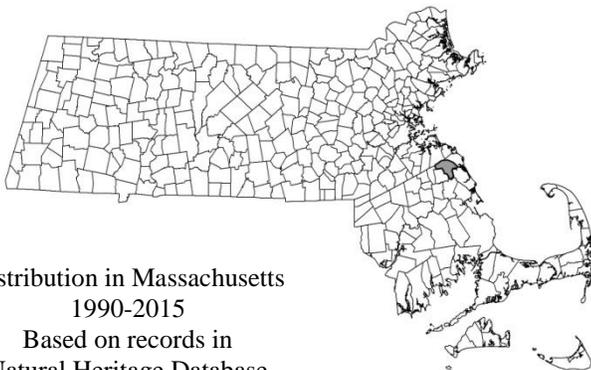
## Marsh-pea *Lathyrus palustris* L.

State Status: **none**  
Federal Status: **none**

**DESCRIPTION:** Marsh-pea is a low-growing, sprawling herbaceous vine in the bean family, with 2-6 bright purple, 3/4-inch long flowers that appear June through August. Wild peas (*Lathyrus* species) are similar to vetches (*Vicia* species) in that they have compound leaves, tendrils for climbing, and stipules, which are small green leafy bracts where the leaf attaches to the stem. Wild peas have fewer and larger leaflets per leaf than vetches.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Marsh-pea can be distinguished in Massachusetts from other wild peas by having sharper, finer stipules that are attached along the side to the stem. The similar Beach Vetchling (*Lathyrus japonicus*) has a much broader stipule that is attached at its base to the stem and has 6-10 flowers per flower stalk, whereas Marsh-pea has only 2-6 flowers.

**HABITAT:** Marsh-pea prefers wet meadows, salt marshes, shores of water bodies, and wetland edges. It has a wetland status of FACW in the New England states indicating that it most often occurs in wetlands.



Distribution in Massachusetts  
1990-2015  
Based on records in  
Natural Heritage Database

**POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS:** Marsh-pea has been found in 22 locations in the Commonwealth, but only 3 locations since 1976 and only one since 1981. It is likely to be quite rare in Massachusetts and more work is needed to determine its status.

**RANGE:** Marsh-pea is common in the Upper Midwest, the St. Lawrence River watershed, and Nova Scotia, and is found all across Canada. In Massachusetts, the species is found only in the southeastern counties, including the Cape and Islands.

**THREATS:** Since this is a wetland species, threats to the Marsh-pea include disruption of the natural hydrologic regime, habitat loss, deer browse, invasive species, shading via an increase in shrubs and trees, and climate change. Inputs of nutrients from farm or lawn fertilizers, as well as excess flooding and siltation may increase the abundance of invading exotic (or aggressive native) plants, such as Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*), cattail (*Typha* species) and Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*).

**MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:** Management recommendations for Marsh-pea include further survey work to document the abundance and distribution of this species, as well as maintaining its natural, open, sunny native wetland habitat through mowing and prescribed fire when shrubs and trees invade a sunny wet meadow.

Prepared by R.W. Wernerehl, 2015

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

## Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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