# WETLAND SHRUB KEY

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## INTRODUCTION

Determining the proper identification of plant species in the field may be of critical importance to biologists, such as determining whether an area meets the criteria for classification as a wetland, or in assessing the floristic quality of a site for natural areas protection. For several years, this key (or earlier versions thereof) has been part of wetland plant identification training courses involving SEWRPC, where there was a need to provide a concise, workable aid to facilitate identifying shrubs typically found in wetlands. It is intended to be used in the field, with the only tools being a hand lens and a metric ruler. It also should be pointed out that this key is designed for use in the State of Wisconsin; it will not necessarily work elsewhere, even in neighboring states.

The definition of 'shrub' is not standardized. Typically, though, definitions include such phrases as "a perennial woody plant of low stature and usually multi-stemmed," "usually no more than 6m tall," and "arborescent." The scope of this key is the woody vascular plant species of Wisconsin normally found in wetlands that usually do not reach tree size. While there are any number of useful guides and keys to trees and herbaceous plants, often species in the shrub size class tend to be overlooked, or only included on an idiosyncratic basis. This key is intended to (at least partially) close that gap. Species included are those found growing outside of cultivation, both native and naturalized. The key also includes woody vines, but it does not cover Gymnosperms.

Floral structures of shrubs tend to be ephemeral, yet the plant itself may well need to be identified at almost any time of the year; thus, this key relies almost exclusively on vegetative characters.

The arrangement of species in the key is strictly an artificial one; that is, they are placed simply where they fall out in the key. Thus, taxa are not placed in any phylogenetic manner. For the most part, for simplicity's sake, hybrids, subspecies, and varieties have been excluded. A guide such as this cannot practically include all shrub species one may encounter in wetlands, or especially along borders of wetlands. There are always going to be those odd species which show up out of place, or even newly introduced species. Thus, some judgment had to be used as to which species to include. Also somewhat arbitrary was the choice of scientific names to use. It should be realized that the focus of this key is a pragmatic one; i.e., the identification of species, not especially with their nomenclature. We understand that more modern treatments may use different nomenclature for a number of species. The names used in the key are those commonly used by the Commission biologists, but are not intended as an endorsement of any particular system. We have used names of long-standing which should be familiar to field biologists. Anyone recognizing different species names is free to use them.

The Wetland Status indicator given along with each species is that assigned to Region 3 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The codes are described as follows:

OBL: Obligate Wetland; species occurring almost exclusively (over 99% of the time) in wetlands

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FACW: Facultative Wetland; species usually found in wetlands (67-99% of the time), but occasionally occurring in uplands

FAC: Facultative; species equally likely to occur in wetlands as in uplands

FACU: Facultative Upland; species occasionally found in wetlands (1-33% of the time), but most frequently in uplands

UPL: Upland; species almost never (less than 1% of the time) found in wetlands

Finally, it should be emphasized that merely because an unknown specimen keys out to a certain species that that identification is necessarily correct. Additional research should be done to ensure that the unknown fits the identification. To aid in that end, a supplement is attached that provides brief descriptions of each species in the key, along with usual habitats and range limitations.

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