

Gypsies, graveyards and mysterious plants

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A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) scientist has confirmed the identity of a strange grass-like sedge discovered in a Mississippi graveyard, and believes the appearance of the potentially invasive plant is linked to the final resting places of several members of a royal Gypsy family.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) [botanist](#) Charles Bryson was asked by Mississippi State University graduate student Lucas Majure to help classify a plant Majure had found in Rose Hill Cemetery in Meridian, Miss. Bryson works at the ARS Crop Production Systems Research Unit in Stoneville, Miss. ARS is USDA's chief intramural scientific research agency.

After several months of searching, Bryson identified the plant as blue sedge (*Carex breviculmis*), a native of Asia and Australia and previously unknown in North America. He also found it growing along railroad tracks, campgrounds used by transients, and in or around four cemeteries in Meridian, including Rose Hill Cemetery.

Visitors from all over the world come to Rose Hill Cemetery to pay their respects at the gravesite of Kelly Mitchell, the Queen of the Gypsies, who was buried there in 1915. Her husband and other family members were also laid to rest in the cemetery.

Given the plant's restricted and distinctive distribution in the region, Bryson thinks that global travelers introduced the sedge to Mississippi, possibly via seeds trapped in clothing or by leaving [plants](#) or soil at the

gravesites of the Gypsy royalty. Then cemetery caretakers may have spread [plant material](#) from the first introduction site to the other cemeteries via contaminated clothing and lawn care equipment.

At two sites where it is now established, the plant exhibits weedy characteristics and reproduces and spreads profusely. To Bryson, these traits suggest that the Old World sedge could someday cause problems in U.S. lawn and turf systems, as well as in fruit and nut crop production.

Bryson and Majure published their findings in the *Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas*.

More information: Read more about this research in the October 2011 issue of Agricultural Research magazine.

www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/oct11/plant1011.htm

Provided by United States Department of Agriculture

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