

Baccharis halimifolia

Family: *Asteraceae*

Saltbush; groundsel tree; sea-myrtle; salt march-elder; waterbrush



Pine Island, Florida, late November

Saltbush

Synonyms: None found

Origin: Florida; north to Massachusetts; U.S. Gulf Coast; Northern Mexico

USDA Zone: 4-11 (Minimum -30°F)

Growth Rate: Moderate to Fast

Flowering Months: October through November

Leaf Persistence: Evergreen in South Florida
deciduous northward

Soil Requirements: Sandy; loamy; wet; dry when fully established

Salt Tolerance: High

Nutritional Requirements: Low

Drought Tolerance: High

Potential Pests: Scales; sooty mold; leaf beetles

Typical Dimensions: 12'x14'

Propagation: Seed; cuttings

Human Hazards: Seeds are poisonous if eaten

Uses: Hedge; specimen; border; large parking lot islands > 200 sq. ft. in size



North Collier County, Florida, early November

Geographic Distribution and Ecological Function

Saltbush's (*Baccharis halimifolia*) native range extends from all of Florida, north to Massachusetts, westward along the Gulf Coast and into northern Mexico. In Florida, it is abundant on the edges of salt and freshwater marshes, sloughs, old fields, along ditches and in disturbed places. It often naturally occurs in association with wax myrtle. Saltbush has become naturalized in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The plant provides some food and significant cover for wildlife. It is a nectar plant for monarch, *Danaus plexippus*, and other butterflies.

Growth Habit, Morphology and Reproduction

Although common to many disturbed areas, saltbush is almost never noticed until it bursts into bloom in the fall. It is a medium woody erect shrub and sometimes a small tree. Its canopy is rarely crowded as its branches are generally well spaced and its leaves are small. Salt bush leaves are simple, alternate, oblanceolate or spatulate. They are entire or deeply toothed particularly toward the apices. Leaves are 1 to 3 inches long with a short petiole. The color of the leaf is a dull grayish green. Individual flowers are unisexual and plants are either male or female. The flowers of both sexes are small and numerous. They are scattered along the leaf branches but clustered more densely toward the branch tips. The male (staminate) plants are smaller, with yellow flower. The female (pistillate) plants produce abundant snow-white flowers that are conspicuous from afar. The fruits, produced by female plants, are a minute compressed achene with 10 pale ribs. They are connected to a mass of fine white bristles known as pappus. Saltbush flowers in fall when few other shrubs or small trees are in bloom. The pollen is an allergen. It freely self-seeds but only if there are male and female plants in close proximity. Propagation is by seeds or by soft or hard wood cuttings.



Leaves can vary considerably in size and shape



Leaves are entire or coarsely toothed. Flowers are borne on conspicuous clusters



Pistillate, female inflorescence, exhibit masses of fine white bristles (pappus)



Gayle Edwards

Staminate, male inflorescence, are yellow and without pappus



A young unbranched sapling



Saltbush leaves are simple and alternating



The old fissured wood of saltbush



Early May, Benn C. Pratt Six Miles Cypress Parkway, Fort Myers



Early November, Benn C. Pratt Six Miles Cypress Parkway, Fort Myers

Planting and Maintenance Guidelines

Saltbush's shrubby habit allows it to blend into the background in most landscapes. It is rarely recommended by either garden designers or landscape architects. However, it deserves a place in the foreground of many naturalized landscapes. It is a useful shrub or small tree for reclaiming wet sites and can be used around retention ponds and basins. Saltbush is resistant to salt sprays, and thus useful in seaside plantings. Although it prefers wet sites, once established, it will tolerate dry soils. For an informal hedge, place plants about 3 feet apart. For standout specimens, spacing should be about 6 to 8 feet apart. If not pruned accordingly, it has the ability to crowd out under-planted species in time. Recurring dead wood can be removed to create a small tree. These small trees are nice additions to many cultivated landscapes. In fall, the white cottony material of the female plants are likely to become a brief nuisance as they are wind-driven for seed dispersion. The plant easily proliferates and is considered weedy by some landscapers. Saltbush responds well to pruning. Prune immediately after it flowers and again, if desired, at the start of summer. The life span of saltbush can be as long as 50 years.



Coccus viridis, green scale, is an insect that feeds on saltbush and other plants and is responsible for a copious amount of sooty mold. Live specimens are easy identified because the black U-shaped gut is visible through the integument. **Left:** Green scale on saltbush in early December. **Above:** Close-up of green scale on *Gardenia jasminoides*.



Top Left: *Pinnaspis strachanni*, white scale, feeding on a saltbush twig in early December. **Top Right:** Close-up of white scale feeding on *Murraya paniculata*. This scale, also known as the lesser snow scale, has a very long list of hosts and can be found on the bark, fruits, and leaves of its hosts.



Both larvae and adults of the leaf beetle, *Trirhabda bacharidis*, feed on saltbush.



Plants growing in North Fort Myers in a swampy area and along a fresh water creek

Early November

Useful Links

[South Florida Native Plant Fact Sheets](#)

[Saltbush YouTube](#)

All pictures taken by Stephen Brown except where indicated.

This fact sheet was reviewed by Peggy Cruz, Lee County Extension; John Sibley, Master Gardener and owner of All Native Garden Center, Nursery & Landscapes, Fort Myers; Gayle Edwards, Lee County Master Gardener; Cathy Feser, Collier County Urban Horticulture Agent and Jenny Evans, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

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