

Suriana maritima

Family: Surianaceae



Compressed, tasseled leaves



Coastal location. South Florida

Common Names: Bay-Cedar, tassel tree, thatch leaf, temporana

Synonyms (Discarded Names): None found

Origin: South Florida, Bahamas, Caribbean, Southern Mexico, Central and South America

U.S.D.A. Zone: 10a-11 (minimum 30°F)

Plant Type: Large shrub, small tree

Growth Rate: Slow

Leaf Persistence: Evergreen

Flowering Months: Sporadic throughout the year

Flower Color: Yellow

Light Requirements: Full sun to light shade

Salt Tolerance: Very tolerant of salt spray

Drought Tolerance: Extremely drought tolerant

Wind Tolerance: High

Soil Requirements: Wide

Nutritional Requirements: Low

Major Potential Pests: None

Typical Dimensions: 6ft to 10ft tall and almost as wide

Propagation: Seeds, cuttings

Human Hazards: None

Uses: Seaside, poolside, planters, parking lots, screens, bonsai, wildlife

Nomenclature

Bay cedar (*Suriana maritima*) is in the family Surianaceae that includes five genera and nine species worldwide. In tropical America there are two genera in the family, *Suriana* (Bay Cedar) and *Ricchis*. *S. maritima* is the only species in the genus *Suriana*.

Nativity

This is strictly a coastal plant. Its habitat is typically sandy beaches and limestone coastal outcrops. Although widely distributed in the tropics, the species is native only to the western hemisphere. In Florida it is found from the Dry Tortugas north to Indian River and Pinellas Counties. It is also known to Bahamas, the Caribbean, the Yucatan Peninsula, and from Central America to Brazil. In Florida, it is rare to uncommon in much of its habitat, but occasionally forms thickets.

Growth Habit

Bay cedar is an evergreen shrub that commonly forms rounded clumps 6-10 feet tall and 5-10 feet in diameter. It sometimes becomes a small tree 15 feet high with a 4 inch trunk diameter. Its natural form is frequently determined by environmental conditions. On coastlines buffeted by constant wind it has a shorter and broader growth habit. In milder locations it has a more upright form and is often treelike in its appearance. The plant has numerous erect slim branches. The branches are quite flexible and arch gracefully outward from the trunk. Bay cedar is densely foliated with a multiplicity of short upright twigs with erect leaves crowded at the tips. The stems just below the leaves are burgundy brown and are covered by whitish hairs. The bark throughout the upper plant is distinctively dark gray, becoming thick, rough, and furrowed at the oldest lower parts.



Bay Cedar in rocky outcrops. Yucatan, Mexico



Coastal location. South Florida



Coastal location. South Florida



Inland garden. South Florida

Kitty Tyler



Pubescent stems



Plants with 4 inch trunk diameters

Leaves

Leaves are simple, entire, and sessile. They are alternately arranged but this is difficult to recognize as they form terminal tufts at the ends of short stems. The older leaves soon fall to cause noticeable scars on the burgundy colored stems. They are succulent and their surfaces densely puberulent. Leaf veins are difficult to discern. The blades are narrowly oblanceolate with a tapering base and an obtuse to acute apex. The color is yellowish gray. They are typically 0.75-1.25 inches long and 0.125-0.25 inches wide.



Leaves are borne at the tips of short stems



Alternating leaves

Flowers

Flowers can appear throughout the year. Few in numbers, they occur singly or in short cymes clustered among the leaves. They are small and somewhat inconspicuous with the petals mostly fallen by midday. The petals are yellow, wide spreading, and the stalk holding the flower to the stem is pale yellow. There are five petals, ten stamens, and five separate pistils. Petals are 0.50 inches long when opened. There are five conspicuous green sepals forming the calyx. Typically one-third inches long.



Flowers in March



Flowers in March close-up

Fruit

The flower develops into a fruit consisting of five drupelets. They are small, 0.12-0.16 inches, and abundant. The drupelets become dry, hard, and brown. Each drupelet has one small seed that does not completely fill its cavity. The five drupelets are nested inside a five pointed green and pendent calyx. The tip



The pendent cyme makes up a cluster of fruit



Fruit are produced in cymes or are solitary

of the calyx extends beyond the drupelets while still exposing the lower portions. The calyxes persist on the plant after the drupelets have fallen away.



The calyx extends beyond the five drupelets



Looking up at a fruit. Notice the five drupelets



A persistent calyx after the drupelets have fallen away

Propagation and Transplanting

Propagation is by seeds or very small seedling transplants. Larger plants can be used if roots are kept wet from digging until replanting. If plants are kept in a bucket of water until replanted the survival rate is good. Additionally, bay cedar should not be pruned back when transplanting.

Use and Maintenance

Bay cedar plays a role in the protection of coastal dunes. It is one of the first shrubs to colonize beaches and dunes that have become stabilized. It is seldom used in landscape planting but is prized when it occurs naturally around houses and other structures. This is a plant best suited for full sun exposure. Once established it grows well without irrigation, even on well-drained sandy soils.

Left to grow on its own, bay cedar can be trained into a small tree for a specimen planting in the landscape or in a container. Planted in a row of 5-6 feet on centers, it functions as a screen. It responds well to trimming and makes a fine hedge. The plant is frequently sold in native plant nurseries in South Florida.

Foliage Distinctions between Bay Cedar, Marsh Elder and Sea Lavender

The distinctions made here are by foliage appearances only. Forms, flowers, fruit and barks are other ways of distinguishing between species.

Bay Cedar (*Suriana maritima*)

Leaves are simple, stalkless, alternate. The blade is narrowly oblanceolate with a tapering base and an obtuse to acute apex. The color is yellowish gray. They are typically 0.75-1.25 inches long and 0.125-0.25 inches wide. Leaves are concentrated at the ends of stems forming a terminal tuft.

Marsh Elder (*Iva imbricata*)

Leaves are simple, stalkless, opposite below, alternate above. Some are arranged in whorls of three, fleshy, lanceolate, entire or shallow toothed. Leaves are not tufted. The plant is herbaceous above and woody below.

Sea Lavender (*Argusia gnaphalodes*)

Leaves are simple, entire, stalkless, thick, linear to spatulate, whitish to silvery gray, and densely-silky tomentose (matted hair). Leaves are typically 3 3/4 inches long but may be up to 5 inches long, and 1/4 inch wide. They are discernible alternate lower on the stem but towards the stem tip they are squeezed together to form a terminal tuft.



Bay cedar



Marsh elder



Marsh elder



Sea lavender

References

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Further Reading

Florida Native Plants:

[Native Plants Fact Sheets](#)

[Gaillardia](#)

[Inkberry](#)

[Railroad Vine](#)

[Sea Grape](#)

[Sea Oats](#)

Trees:

[Eucalyptus Trees](#)

[How to Identify a Tree](#)

[Italian Cypress and Mast Trees](#)

[Laurel and Live Oaks Distinctions](#)

[Shade Trees](#)

[Small Trees](#)

Flowering Trees:

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This fact sheet was reviewed Peggy Cruz, Lee County Extension; Pat Rooney, Jean Metcalf, Anita Marshall, Lee County Master Gardeners and Jenny Evans, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

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