

Sea oats

(*Uniola paniculata*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

There is nothing more iconic to the Florida summer coastal scene than Sea oats swaying to the sea breeze in the dunes. The flowers of this tall and sprawling grass provide pollen to a variety of insects, and the seeds are eaten by beach mice, rabbits and birds.

Culms reaching up to 8' bear branching panicles that can stretch to over 2' and at maturity will droop down. Each panicle has numerous elliptical spikelets containing light green florets that produce yellow anthers. Leaves are up to 2' long and slender with tufts of hairs near the collar. Single seeds are each born in a small (.3-.5 cm) caryopsis.



Photo by Emily Bell

You've got to be incredibly tough to not only survive but thrive in the harsh sand dune ecosystem, and Sea oats are as hardy as they come. Not only do they withstand hurricane force winds and saltwater inundation from storm surge, but their deep dense roots (reaching down to 40') anchor the surrounding sand in place, holding their whole habitat together. The coastal protection offered by Sea oats is so important that these plants are protected by Florida state statute.

Family: Poaceae (Grass family)

Native range: Most coastal counties and the Keys

To see where natural populations of Sea oats name have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–11

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Dry, well-drained sandy soils

Exposure: Full sun

Growth habit: Tall and spreading grass growing up to 8'.

Propagation: Root division or cuttings, seed

Garden tips: Sea oats make a fantastic foundational specimen plant in coastal landscapes. Just be sure to give them plenty of space as they will spread via rhizomes. Other coastal species such as Dune sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*), Standing cypress (*Ipomopsis rubra*), and Pricklypear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*) make great companion plants.

Plants are occasionally available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.