Saltbush

(Baccharis halimifolia)

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



Photo by Emily Bell

Also known as Groundsel tree, Silverling and Sea myrtle, Saltbush is a long-lived perennial shrub native to coastal uplands, pond margins, ditches and disturbed areas. It blooms profusely in fall, then puts on a stunning white display as it goes to seed in late fall through winter. Saltbush is a highly valuable plant for pollinators, attracting a wide variety of bees and butterflies, including Monarchs. It provides good habitat for birds and other wildlife, who also enjoy the seeds (which are toxic to humans).

Saltbush is dioecious, meaning each plant bears either all male or all female flowers. The abundant blooms form in dense, terminal clusters of tiny narrow, tubular flowers in shades of cream to greenish-white. As pollinated female flowers mature they develop cottony pappus and resemble tiny, silvery-white paint brushes. The seeds are wind dispersed and float through the breeze like snowflakes. The thick, grayish-green leaves are obovate to rhomboid with toothed margins and are alternately arranged. This densely branched shrub is evergreen in southern Florida but can be deciduous in the northern part of the state.

Family: Asteraceae (daisy or composite family)
Native range: Throughout Florida
To see where natural populations of Saltbush have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.
Lifespan: Perennial
Soil: Moist to dry, well-drained soils
Exposure: Full sun to minimal shade
Growth habit: 6-12' tall and up to 5+' wide
Propagation: Seed, cuttings
Florida regions of landscape suitability: North, Central, South
Garden tips: Saltbush works well as a buffer or screen planting and is fairly tolerant of salt and drought. Because it is dioecious, both male and female plants are needed for seed production. The wind-dispersed seeds travel easily, so female plants can spread and become weedy. For this reason, male plants may be preferred in the home landscape, though they do not provide a showy display.

Saltbush is often available at nurseries that specialize in native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a native nursery in your area.

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