

Salt Marsh Plant Identification Guide

Along the saltwater shoreline, the “intertidal zone” is the band of land between the sea and the uplands, those habitats harbored at higher elevations. The lower elevations become covered with salt water during high tides, allowing the soil to retain the water’s salt. The salinity in the soil is so high few plants can survive, but several select species have developed a tolerance to the salt and unique adaptive strategies to living within the salty soil.

The majority of the area’s plants are grasses, sedges, rushes and succulent plants such as saltwort and glasswort. This marsh habitat is an open system dominated by these lower plants – there are, in fact, rarely any trees found within the salt marsh. These grassy coastal areas help prevent erosion by anchoring the soil in place and trapping mud within their leaves during high tide.

While these marshes are found along coastal areas, these saltwater habitats cannot survive in a place with lots of wave action. Rather, these areas are “low energy” locations which receive tidal influence, but lack the pounding surf found closer to the ocean and Gulf.

The salt marsh project at Robinson Preserve will provide habitat to a variety of wildlife. Smaller creatures, such as fiddler crabs and mice, hide among the tall grasses and seek protection from predators. At high tides, juvenile mullet and red fish swim among the flooded marsh and are also offered sanctity from larger, hungry creatures. As the marsh plants die, they rot and become detritus. This decaying plant material is a foundation of the coastal food chain, serving to feed a number of small animals which, in turn, feed larger animals such as wading birds, mammals, large crabs and fish.

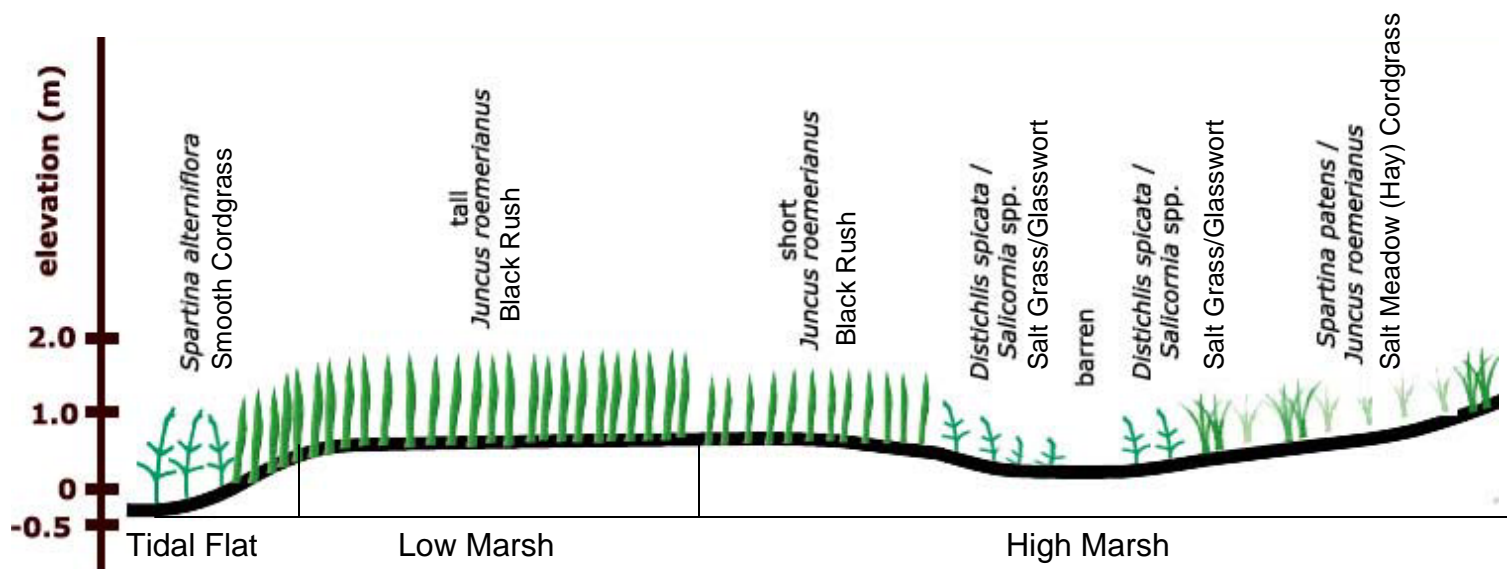


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Manatee County Natural Resources Department
U.S. E.P.A - Gulf of Mexico Program
Tampa Bay Estuary Program



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Sea Purslane
Sesuvium portulacastrum

Plant grows along ground and has fleshy green leaves, with pink/purple flowers



Sand Cordgrass
Spartina bakeri

Bushy grass that grows in clumps, leaves are dark on top, light on the bottom, found in the high marsh



Common Glasswort
Salicornia bigelovii

Tall plant with long, finger-like leaves which might be green, yellow, or even red, stem may also be red or green



Smooth Cordgrass
Spartina alterniflora

Tall grass that grows in clumps, leaves long and stiff, found in the low marsh closest to the water



Saltwort
Batis maritima

Growing along the vine or as a small shrub, the plant has bright green, curved leaves and a yellow or gray stem



Salt Meadow/Hay Cordgrass
Spartina patens

Leaf blades are rolled in, grows in clumps, found in the high marsh but it is closer to the water than *S. bakeri*



Seashore Paspalum
Paspalum vaginatum

Grows as a creeping, rhizomous carpet-like plant with bright green leaves



Black Rush
Juncus roemerianus

Gray-green to black leaves that are so tightly rolled they look like stems



Sea Blite
Suaeda linearis

A scrubby plant with greenish to yellow or white stem and dark green, elliptical leaves



Salt Grass
Distichlis spicata

Opposite spiky leaves with a broad, spike-like flowers