

EASTERN BACCHARIS

Baccharis halimifolia L.

Plant Symbol = BAHA

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Alternate Names

groundsel tree, saltmyrtle, seamyrtle, silverling

Warning: The leaves of this plant are poisonous to livestock.

Uses

Eastern baccharis plants are dioecious, meaning there are separate male and female plants. The female plants are particularly attractive in flower and make a good landscape plant in exposed coastal conditions. This plant is highly resistant to salt spray and flooding.

Habitat: Marsh wrens and other small birds frequently nest in the openly branched, brittle stems.

Erosion control: This plant is currently being investigated for application in soil bioengineering

systems to stabilize tidal shorelines because of its ability to root from a dormant, unrooted cutting.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Eastern baccharis is a deciduous shrub, up to 10 feet tall; with simple, thick egg-shaped leaves (up to 2.5" long). It is a U.S. native. Leaves are mostly coarsely toothed above the middle of the leaf, and the uppermost leaves have smooth margins; they are alternately arranged. Baccharis has small heads of white flowers in stalked clusters that form terminal leafy inflorescences. The fertile heads are very showy and cottonlike. Although deciduous, the naked stems remain slightly green throughout the winter. Baccharis is often confused with high-tide bush (*Iva frutescens*) which has opposite, regularly toothed leaves and bare, gray stems in the winter.

Adaptation and Distribution

Eastern baccharis grows naturally in the upper fringes of irregularly flooded tidal fresh and brackish marshes, back dunes and inland open woods, vacant fields, and desert habitats from Massachusetts to Florida, Arkansas, and Texas.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

These plants are most commonly installed as 1 to 2 year old containerized material. Investigations are underway to determine the rooting ability in the field from a dormant unrooted cutting. If rooting success is high, the potential exists for incorporating baccharis into soil bioengineering systems for tidal shoreline stabilization.

Management

The facultative light requirement of baccharis seeds may provide one opportunity for effective management to control the species as a weed. The maintenance of a dense stand of pasture, plantation or native cover may effectively shade the ground

surface, discouraging seed germination. The loss of viability of seed after 14 months or less implies that local eradication of a population at a single point in time could rapidly curb regeneration. On the other hand, prolific seed production from a single plant will avoid eradication.

Pests and Potential Problems

A beetle, *Trirhabda baccharidis*, may assist in reducing seed viability and potential rate of spread in semi-tidal areas, but it is not anticipated that it will effect any significant reduction in the groundsel bush infestation outside such areas.

Environmental Concerns

Baccharis has the ability to grow in dense clusters reaching over 3 feet in height with in 2 to 3 years. This shrub usurps resources that otherwise might be utilized by commercial pastures and timber species in coastal regions with an annual rainfall of over 90 cm. Baccharis may also be a nuisance in populated areas because its pollen and other airborne plant parts are believed to be allergenic. Irrigation channels and coastal canals provide favorable man-made habitats for this species. Best germination temperature under constant light is 25 degrees Celsius. The well-known baccharis foliage feeding beetle *Trirhabda baccharidis* (mentioned in the previous section) can reach very high densities in the field and larval hatching in autumn can cause complete defoliation at anthesis.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

This plant is commercially available from specialized coastal and wetland plant nurseries.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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