

Canavalia maritima Beach Bean, Bay Bean¹

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Introduction

Beach bean is a dense ground cover that is commonly found in the coastal sands of southeast Florida (Fig. 1). This plant forms a ground cover that is 6 to 12 inches in height but can occasionally be found climbing a small tree. The evergreen, trifoliate leaves have elliptic, 2 1/2- to 3 1/2-inch-long leaflets that are rounded at their apices. Small racemes of pink to purple flowers occur among these bright green leaves throughout the year. These beautiful flowers are followed by robust, woody pods.

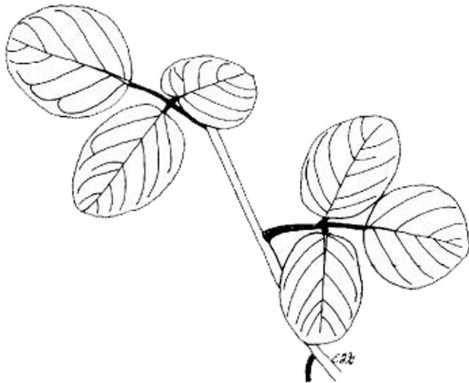


Figure 1. Beach bean.

General Information

Scientific name: *Canavalia maritima*

Pronunciation: kan-uh-VAL-ee-uh muh-RIT-tim-uh

Common name(s): beach bean, bay bean

Family: Leguminosea

Plant type: vine; ground cover

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: cascading down a wall

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: depends upon supporting structure

Spread: depends upon supporting structure

Plant habit: prostrate (flat); spreading

Plant density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: trifoliate

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Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: brachidodrome; pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: purple
Flower characteristic: year-round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: good
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

This ground cover resists erosion by wind and light surf and is ideal for coastal landscapes. The bright green leaves and showy flowers of this plant are sure eye-catchers. It is a wonderful utility plant for stabilizing sandy soils and makes a nice bed for trees and shrubs. It might climb up onto dense shrubs and the trunks of trees. This could be a maintenance problem for some landscapes.

Beach bean, as the name implies, has a high drought and salt spray tolerance. It prefers well-drained soils and full sun exposures.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.