

Suriana maritima Bay Cedar¹

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Introduction

The bay cedar is endemic to south Florida, the Caribbean, Central America, and the Bahamas. It was commonly found growing in thickets, on sand dunes and rocky shores, often just back of the high tide line, but is now on the endangered plants list. This 5- to 20-foot-tall plant has a sturdy, branched trunk that has beautiful, dark brown, rough, flaky bark; the wood of this tree is very hard and heavy. Branches arch gracefully and hold the evergreen leaves on short, upturned twigs. The tiny, gray-green leaves are fleshy and minutely downy; the new leaves and twigs are particularly downy. Yellow, cup-shaped flowers may occur singly or in clusters that are inconspicuously set among the leaves. These small flowers occur consistently throughout the year. The seeds of the bay cedar are held in a small, brown, five-pointed calyx.



Figure 2. Flower—*Suriana maritima*: Bay cedar.

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General Information

Scientific name: *Suriana maritima*

Pronunciation: ser-ree-AY-nuh muh-RIT-tim-muh

Common name(s): bay cedar

Family: *Surianaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida



Figure 1. Full Form—*Suriana maritima*: Bay cedar.

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Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: container or above-ground planter; superior hedge; mass planting; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; border; attracts butterflies

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 5 to 20 feet

Spread: 5 to 8 feet

Plant habit: oval

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: spatulate

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristic: attracts birds

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; showy

Current year stem/twig color: brown

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: good

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Bay cedar is not commonly used in the landscape but could function as a specimen or border plant in beach locations. It has been used as a hedge because it responds well to clipping. Left to grow on its own, bay cedar can be trained into a small tree for a specimen planting in the landscape or in a container. Planted in a row on 5- to 6-foot centers, it functions as a screen.

Bay cedar has a high tolerance for salt and wind and is ideal for coastal landscapes. It will grow well in well-drained, sandy soils without irrigation once established and needs to be placed in a mostly sunny location.

Bay cedar is currently propagated by seed.

Pest and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.