

# *Alternanthera maritima*: Alternanthera, Seaside Joyweed<sup>1</sup>

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<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

*This document is a part of a series that was originally written by Edward F. Gilman.*

## Introduction

Seaside joyweed is a native drought- and salt-tolerant herbaceous groundcover (Figure 1). This plant has small, succulent evergreen leaves (Figure 2). Inconspicuous yellow and white flowers are produced at the nodes (Figure 3). This species can be found in coastal and hammock ecosystems in south Florida. It is generally not considered a common landscaping plant but may be found at certain native plant nurseries. Stems creep along the sand, rooting at the nodes and sending up new shoots. The plant quickly covers an area in this manner, growing to about 6 inches tall, and may reseed itself in consecutive years. It is well suited as a groundcover or may cascade when planted near the edge of a wall. This plant is also suitable for coastal landscaping, dune stabilization, and habitat restoration.



Figure 1. Full form—*Alternanthera maritima*: seaside joyweed.

Credit: © Joe Benjamin, some rights reserved (CC-BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Alternanthera maritima*: seaside joyweed.

Credit: Jade Fortnash, no rights reserved (CC0) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Alternanthera maritima*: seaside joyweed.

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## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Alternanthera maritima*

**Pronunciation:** al-tur-nan-THEER-uh muh-RIT-tim-uh

**Common name(s):** Alternanthera

**Family:** *Amaranthaceae*

**Plant type:** herbaceous; groundcover

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9A through 11B; in coastal areas (Figures 4 and 5)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9A-11A

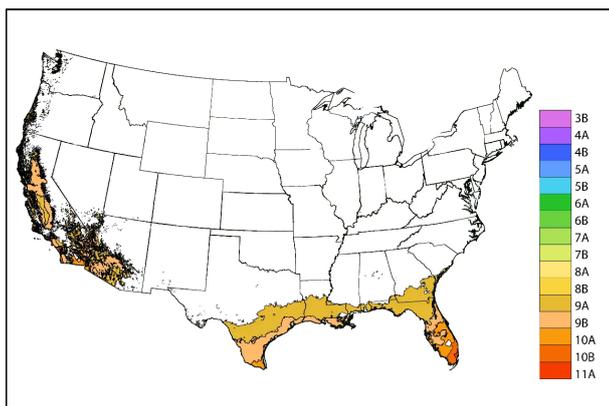


Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map. Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

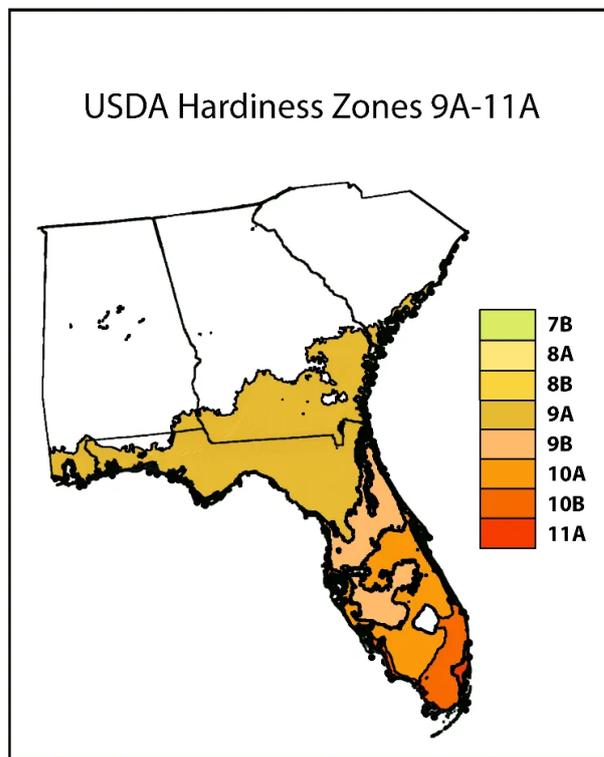


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

**Planting month for zone 9:** year-round

**Planting month for zones 10 and 11:** year-round

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Uses:** groundcover; cascading down a wall; habitat restoration; coastal landscaping

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

## Description

**Height:** 0.5 to 1 foot

**Spread:** 2 to 3 feet

**Plant habit:** spreading

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**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:** white, yellow

**Flower characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** irregular; utricle

**Fruit length:** less than 0.5 inch

**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:** green

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerance:** good

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Invasive potential:** may self-seed each year

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Seaside joyweed is a hardy native plant that tolerates nutrient poor, sandy soils. It is also highly drought tolerant and exhibits salt tolerance, making it a suitable plant for coastal landscaping. This plant thrives when planted in full sun. Plant on 3- to 4-foot centers to quickly establish a dense groundcover. The moderately thick stems will cascade and cover a wall nicely when planted near the edge.

## Design Considerations

Seaside joyweed serves as a textural groundcover that complements and enhances the features of its companions. For a classic coastal dune look, combine it with plants that offer strong vertical contrast. An effective pairing is with sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*). The tall, graceful, and swaying habit of the sea oats rising directly from the dense, silvery-green mat of the seaside joyweed creates a dynamic and resilient composition that is the very definition of a stable dune ecosystem.

To introduce a bolder texture and form, plant seaside joyweed around the base of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), particularly the silver variety. The fine, delicate foliage of seaside joyweed creates a soft foundation that contrasts beautifully with the palmetto's large, rigid, fan-shaped fronds. For a splash of color, allow beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) to weave through the seaside joyweed. Both are low-growing, salt-tolerant spreaders, but the sunflower's bright yellow daisy-like flowers will appear to float atop the fine-textured carpet of the seaside joyweed, creating pockets of seasonal color and interest without appearing messy.

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

<sup>1</sup> This document is FPS 037, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date September 1999. Revised May 2007 and December 2025. Visit the Ask IFAS website at <https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/> for the currently supported version of this publication. *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit [ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/](http://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/).*

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