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Canavalia rosea: Beach Bean, Bay Bean[1]

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This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/ *to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.*

Introduction

Beach bean (*Canavalia rosea*) is a dense ground cover that is native to the coastal dune ecosystem of Florida. Beach bean is an important part of coastal ecosystems, as it stabilizes the sand dunes against erosion. This plant forms an evergreen groundcover that is 6 to 12 inches in height, but it may occasionally be found climbing a small tree (Figure 1). This plant spreads quickly in the landscape. The trifoliate leaves have elliptic 2½- to 3½-inch-long leaflets that are rounded at their apices. This plant's leaves fold up in hot weather to conserve water (Figure 2). Small racemes of pink to purple flowers occur among these bright green leaves throughout the year, with a peak blooming season from summer to fall (Figure 3). These beautiful flowers are followed by robust, woody pods, which may be 4 to 6 inches long (Figure 4). Beach bean seed pods are transported by ocean currents and germinate in other locations along the shoreline. This plant is very hardy, salt tolerant, drought tolerant, tolerant of nutrient-poor soils and windy beachside conditions. Beach bean may be used in coastal restoration projects, in coastal landscaping, cascading down a wall, or as a dense groundcover in sandy areas.

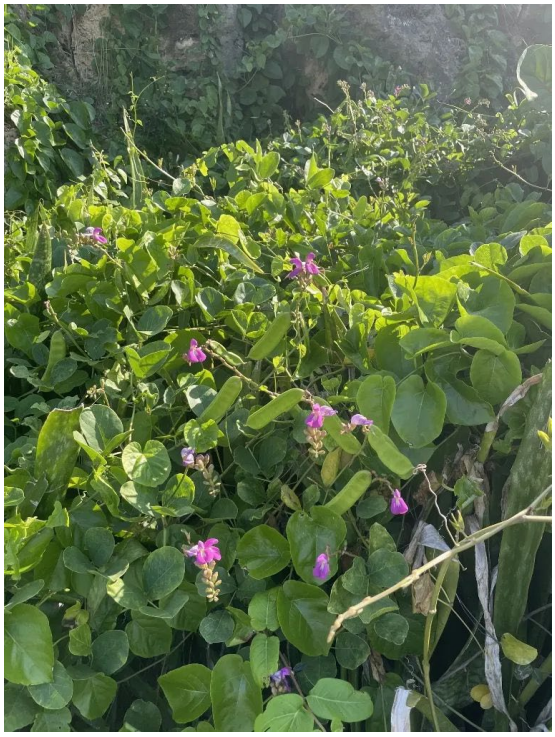

Figure 1. Full form—*Canavalia rosea*: beach bean. Credit: © Evan C, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist

Figure 2. Leaf—*Canavalia rosea*: beach bean. Credit: © Alec Cowles, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist

Figure 3. Flower—*Canavalia rosea*: beach bean.
Credit: © genevieve, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC-ND) via iNaturalist

Figure 4. Fruit—*Canavalia rosea*: beach bean.
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General Information

Scientific name: *Canavalia rosea*

Previous scientific name(s): *Canavalia maritima*

Pronunciation: kan-uh-VAL-ee-uh row-sea-ah

Common name(s): beach bean, bay bean, seaside jackbean

Family: *Fabaceae*

Plant type: vine; groundcover

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)

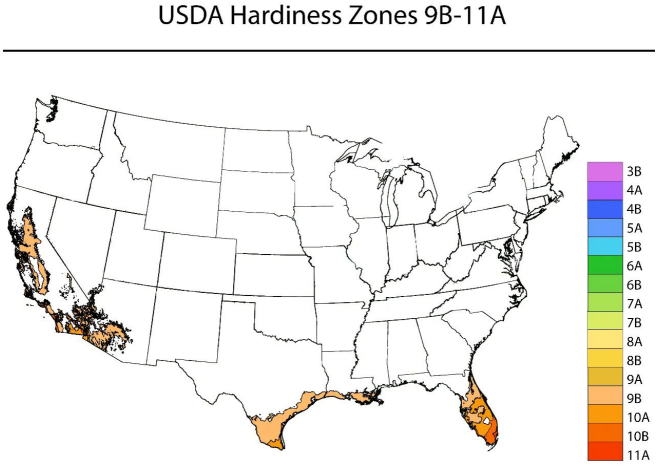

Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

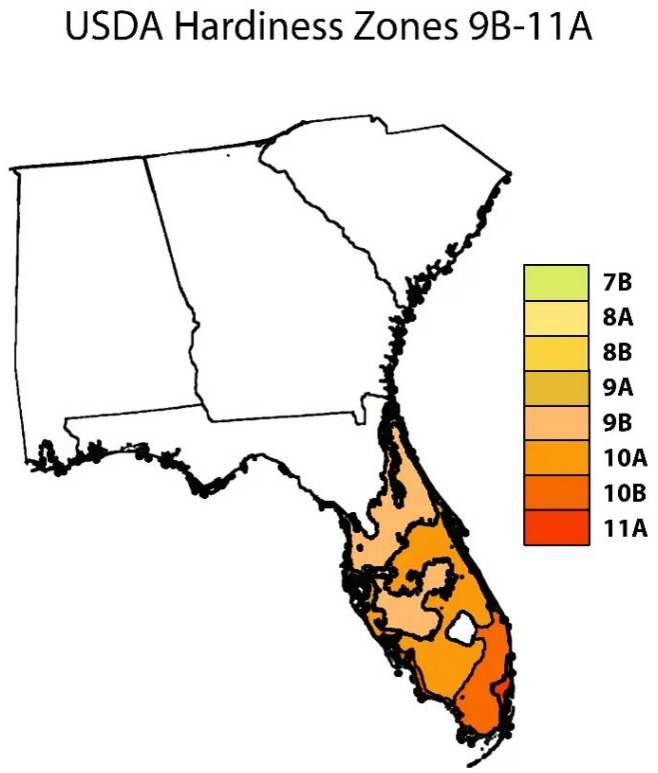

Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 9B: year-round

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: cascading down a wall; groundcover; coastal restoration

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

Description

Height: 6–12 inches as a groundcover; depends upon supporting structure

Spread: depends upon space available

Plant habit: prostrate (flat); spreading

Plant density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: trifoliate

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: brochidodromous; 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; pink

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: evergreen foliage; year-round flowers

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

Toxicity: this plant has toxic characteristics; seed pods and seeds contain canavanine; toxic if ingested

Use and Management

Beach bean should be planted on sandy, well-drained soil. It grows in full-sun coastal conditions, and is tolerant of salt spray, wind, drought, and nutrient-poor soils. This plant generally acts as a dense groundcover but may climb surrounding trees or structures. Maintenance may be required to keep the plant within bounds, as it can have a rapid growth rate. Beach bean is well-suited for landscapes close to coastal areas, dune restoration, or as a groundcover in sandy soils.

Design Considerations

Beach bean is a low, sprawling coastal groundcover with bright green foliage and pink-purple flowers. Its dense roots stabilize sandy soils and help control erosion from wind and light surf, making it effective as a mass planting. For contrast, pair its uniform, horizontal habit with upright, textural plants: muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) offers fine, airy foliage and pink fall plumes; sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*) add bold, wind-swept texture and iconic seed heads. For broader scale, use large-leaved

shrubs like seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) for structure and cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) for a dense, rounded form with glossy leaves and reddish new growth.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

[1] This document is FPS100, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised March 2023 and February 2026. 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/*.

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