

Sea Oats - Holding Strong

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The forefront of shoreline protection is anchored deeply in the sand. Iconic dune scenes, like those of majestic coppery **Sea Oats (*Uniola paniculate*)** seedheads blowing in the wind beckon even the most ardent landlubber to the beach. Sea oats is an extremely valuable plant for coastline and barrier island protection. Its massive root system is capable of holding soil and sand in place during extreme weather events such as hurricanes and tropical storms. It is also capable of catching blowing sand and building dunes. Sea oats, a perennial grass, grows erect to about six feet in height. It is long lived, slow growing and is associated with upper dune establishment along beach fronts. It produces a massive root system. Burial of the plant's base by blowing sand actually stimulates plant growth and helps the plant spread via rhizomes and tacking down at the stem nodes. Interestingly, despite producing many large panicles – the flat spikelets containing seed – it is not a prolific seed producer. The seeds are dispersed by wind and can be carried long distances by storms and ocean currents, but reproduction commonly occurs vegetatively by the plant forming buds around stem bases. The plant forms both dense surface roots and penetratingly deep roots that are colonized by beneficial organisms such as mycorrhizal fungi. The seedheads are eaten by Red-winged Blackbirds, sparrows, beach mice and insects. (USDA and Wikipedia information)