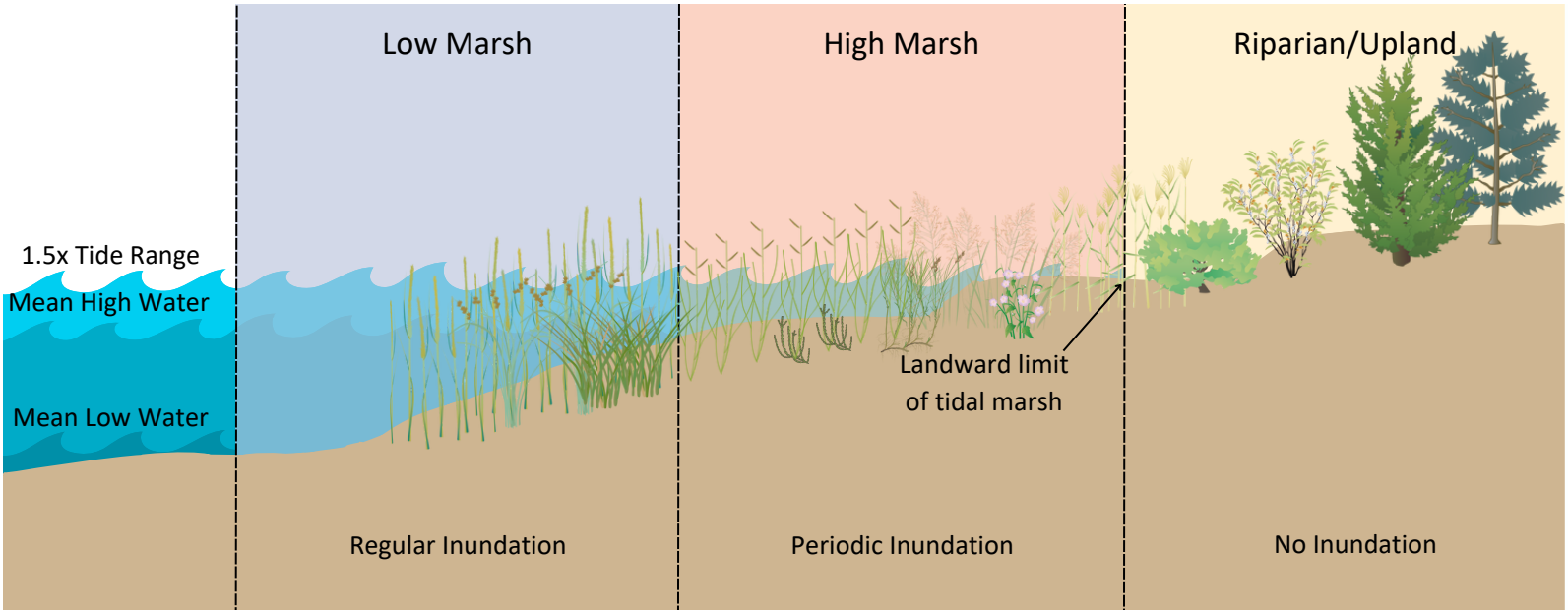
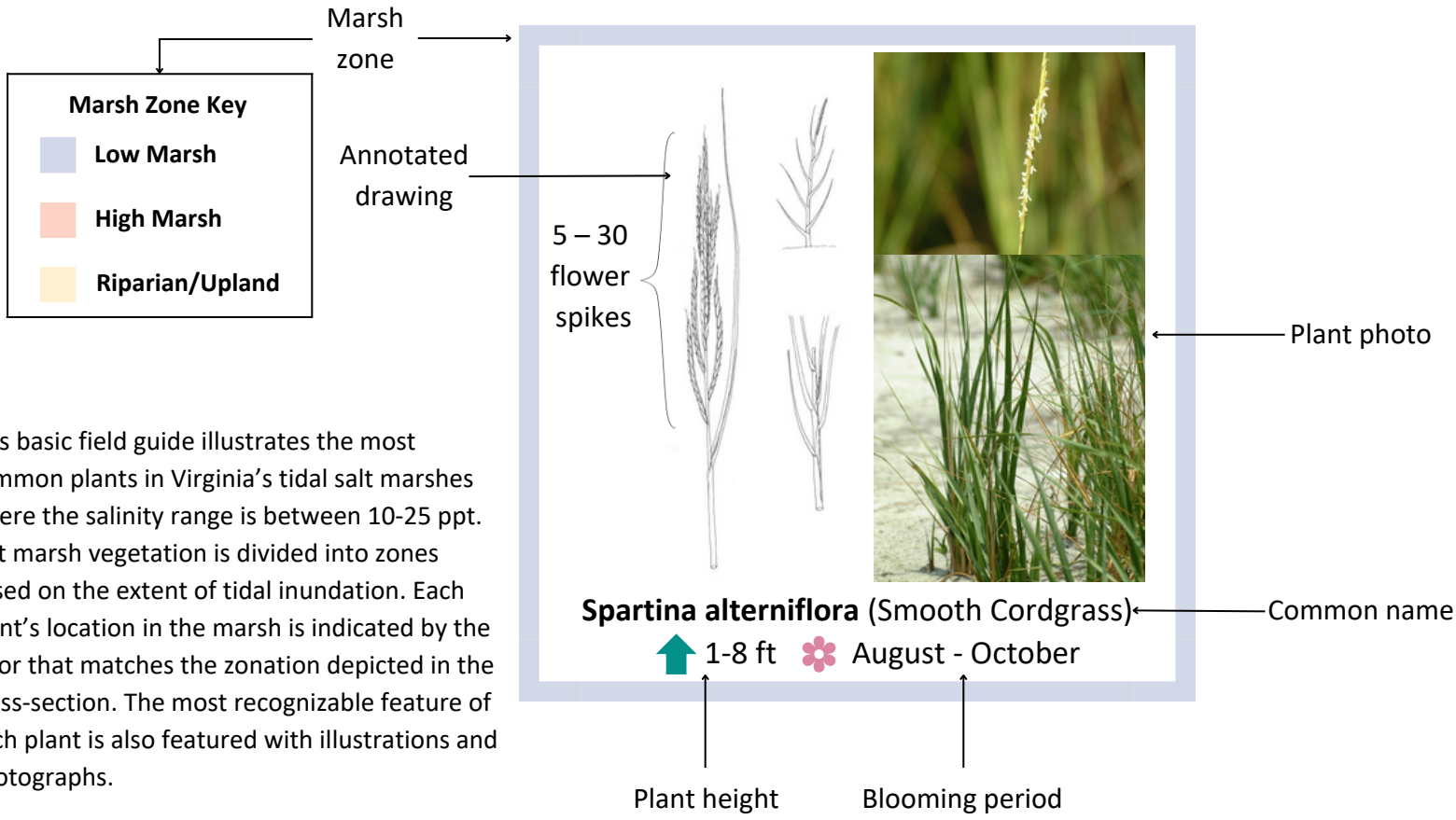
Field Guide to Virginia Salt and Brackish Marsh Plants



Plant depictions courtesy of IAN symbol library



This basic field guide illustrates the most common plants in Virginia's tidal salt marshes where the salinity range is between 10-25 ppt. Salt marsh vegetation is divided into zones based on the extent of tidal inundation. Each plant's location in the marsh is indicated by the color that matches the zonation depicted in the cross-section. The most recognizable feature of each plant is also featured with illustrations and photographs.

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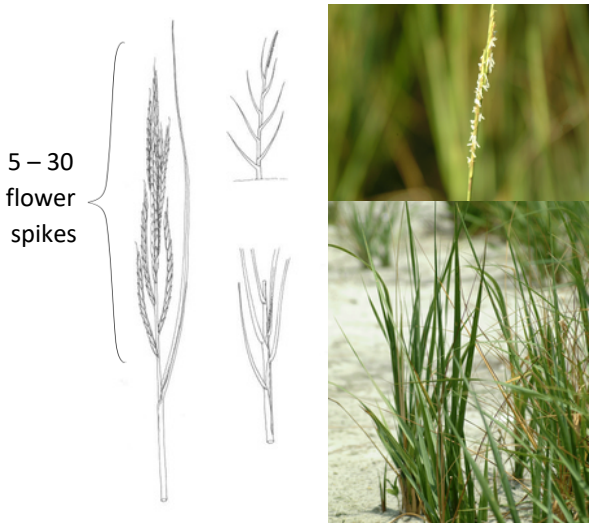
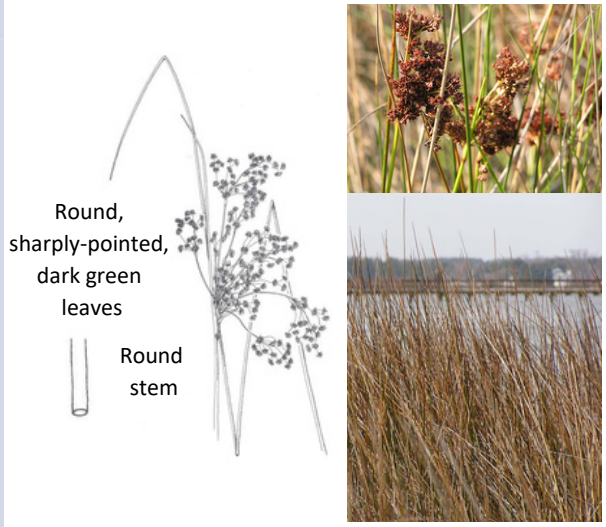
All illustrations in this brochure by Abigail Rorer from Field Guide to Coastal Wetland Plants of the Southeastern United States, Ralph W. Tiner, 1987, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA. 328 pp. This book is recommended reading for an easy-to-use field guide to over 400 plants found in tidal wetlands of the Southeast, with more than 250 plants illustrated. It includes species found in the following habitats: tidal aquatic beds, salt and brackish marshes, salt flats, mangrove swamps, and tidal freshwater marshes and swamps. Simple keys guide the reader in identification of these species. An overview of coastal wetland ecology is also presented along with information on and figures showing the general distribution of coastal wetlands along the South Atlantic and Gulf Coasts (Virginia to Texas).



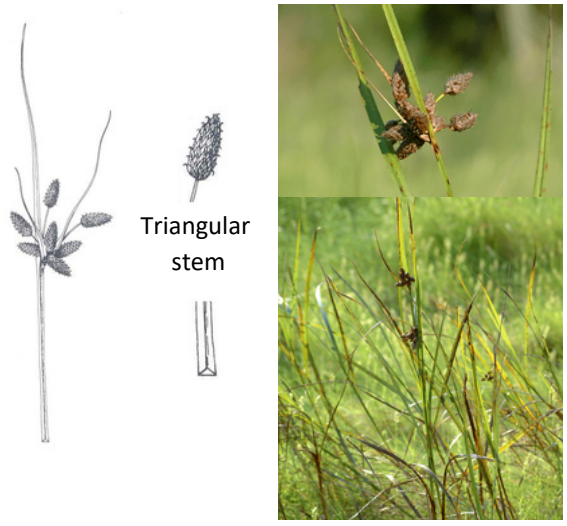
Spartina alterniflora (Smooth Cordgrass)

1-8 ft August - October



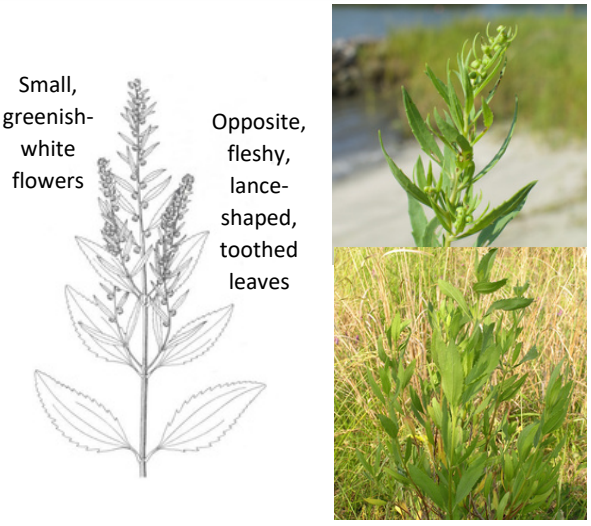
Juncus roemerianus (Black Needle Rush)

up to 3 ft April - October



Bolboschoenus robustus (Salt Marsh Bulrush)

2-3 ft July - October

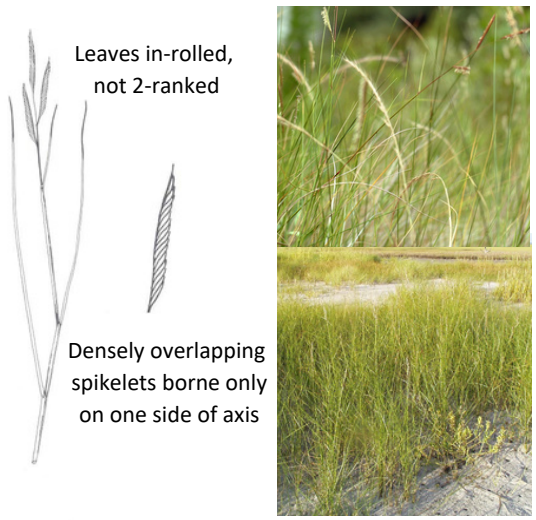


Iva frutescens (Marsh Elder)

2-6 ft August - October

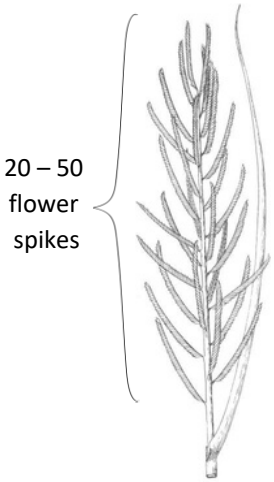
Panicum virgatum (Switch Grass)

up to 3 ft July - September



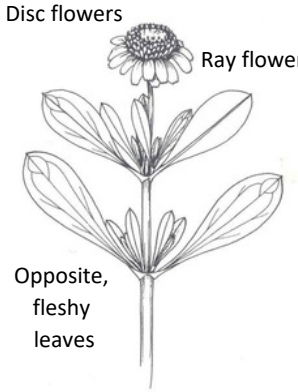
Spartina patens (Salt Meadow Hay)

1-3 ft July - September



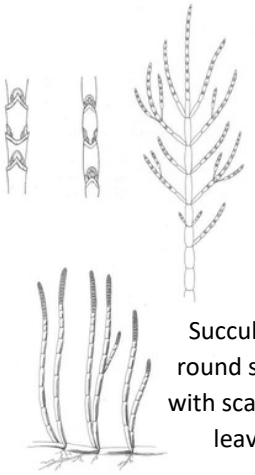
Spartina cynosuroides (Big Cordgrass)

up to 10 ft July - September



Borrichia frutescens (Sea Oxeye)

up to 3 ft July - September



Salicornia spp. (Glasswort)

4-20 in July - November

Kosteletzkya virginica (Marsh Mallow)

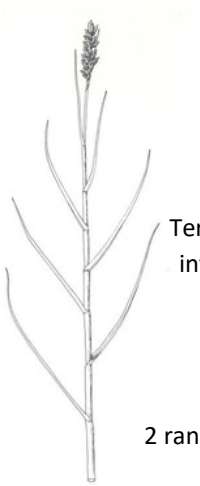
2-3 ft July - August

Hibiscus moscheutos (Marsh Hibiscus)

up to 12 ft July - September

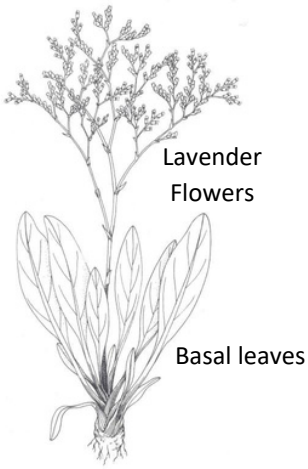
Solidago sempervirens (Seaside Goldenrod)

4-5 ft August - October



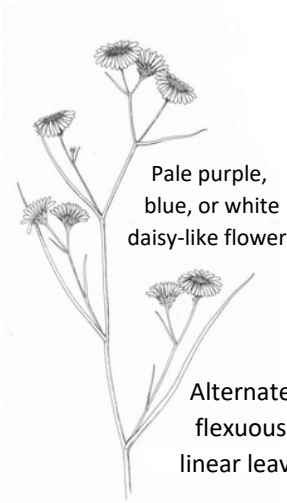
Distichlis spicata (Salt Grass)

8-16 in July - September



Limonium carolinianum (Sea Lavender)

up to 3 ft July - October



Symphyotrichum tenuifolium (Salt Marsh Aster)

1-4 ft July - September

Atriplex patula (Marsh Orach)

up to 4 ft July - September

Phragmites australis (Phragmites or Reed Grass)

6-14 ft September - October

Baccharis halimifolia (Groundsel Tree)

up to 8 ft September - October