



BLACK MANGROVE

Avicennia germinans (L.) L.

Plant Symbol = AVGE

Alternative Names

Common Names: None in common use

Scientific Names: *Avicennia nitida*

Description

General: Black mangrove is a subtropical native coastal evergreen shrub along the northern Gulf coast or coastal evergreen tree in Florida in the verbena family (Verbenaceae) that grows in salt marshes. Plant height will vary from four to nine feet tall on the northern Gulf coast. However, black mangrove trees can grow 40 to 50 feet in height in Florida (Andreu et al., 2025). Mangroves are very hardy, having become adapted to harsh environments where water and salinity levels fluctuate. Black mangrove has been shown to dominate the higher levels of creek banks while also dominating shorelines and displaying greater cold tolerance than other mangrove species. This species is the only mangrove species that occurs between 26-30° N in the United States (Patterson et al., 1997). Black mangrove produces pneumatophores, or breather roots that form a network, collecting silt and debris and controlling erosion (Ewel et al., 1998; Furukawa et al., 1997; Perry & Mendelssohn, 2009). Leaves are one to five inches long, elliptical, opposite, thick, leathery, dark green, glabrous (smooth) above and grayish with a tight felt-like pubescence beneath. Clusters of small flowers with white petals are approximately ½ inch in diameter and are borne in the leaf axils or growing tips on the twigs. The fruit are flat, approximately one inch long, dark green and glabrous beneath a velvety pericarp. The bark on the black mangrove is thick, dark brown or blackish, with rough irregular flattened scales and exhibits cracks as the tree matures. Twigs are grayish in color and smooth, with enlargements at the joints. The upper side of the leaves can appear white due to the formation of salt crystals being excreted from the leaves.

Distribution: Black mangrove occurs across tropical and subtropical coastal regions of the Americas, from the Gulf coast of the United States through Caribbean to Central and South America, as well as along the Atlantic coast of West Africa (Plants of the World Online, 2026; World Flora Online, 2026). It typically occupies intertidal environments such as mangrove swamps, estuaries, and muddy or sandy shorelines just above the high-tide line (World Flora Online, 2026). States where black mangrove is native include Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat: Black mangrove habitat is characterized by high salinity, periodic flooding, and anoxic soils, conditions it tolerate through specialized adaptations such as salt-excreting leaf glands and pneumatophores that support gas exchange (Lonard et al., 2017). Within these habitats, it plays an essential ecological role by stabilizing shorelines, trapping sediments, buffering wave energy, and supporting diverse fish and wildlife communities.



Figure 1-Black mangrove growing in coastal setting. Photo by: Garret Thomassie, USDA NRCS Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center, Galliano, Louisiana.

Adaptation

Black mangrove is adapted to the sub-tropical to tropical Gulf coast intertidal zones. It dominates the higher elevation creekbanks and shorelines. The plant thrives in fine to medium textured soils and has tolerance to anaerobic (lack of free oxygen) and high calcium carbonate soil profiles (Patterson et al, 1997). Black mangrove propagules float in brackish to full salt water until they are stranded on land. This plant is susceptible to freezing temperatures and the native range can be changed drastically by hard winters (Stevens et al., 2006). The contributions of genetic diversity and habitat were studied to determine cold hardiness and showed black mangrove increasing its range with warming seas (Hester et al, 2007). Black mangrove can regulate its internal salt concentration through salt secretion and grows in a wide range of salinities; but its ability to increase leaf area is limited under high salinity conditions.

Uses

Erosion control: Black mangrove is valuable in soil conservation as a means of filtering and trapping sediment in brackish and saltwater marshes. It provides land stabilization through quick aerial root production. Black mangrove also mixes well with other native plants to reduce wave energy (Patterson et al, 1993, 1997).

Nutrient management: Mangrove trees can be used as a trap for nutrients and pollutants.

Wildlife: Pneumatophores (breather roots) of black mangrove serve as excellent nursery habitat for multiple small marine animals in the marsh community. Black mangrove detritus (dead leaves and twigs) in the water feed microorganisms that provide food for young marine life (Tomlinson, 1986). Patterson et al. (1997) reported that crabs feed on the mangrove propagules which can minimize natural propagation of mangroves. Additionally, wading birds and fish species caught in Louisiana utilize the mass of roots in mangrove systems for food sources. Brown pelicans, various species of egrets and herons, and multiple other birds use coastal trees and shrubs including black mangrove for nesting habitat (Small, 1933; Visser et al., 2005).

Ethnobotany

Black mangrove is primarily used for fuelwood and used in construction as poles, fences, and shelters. They are also used for non-wood purposes. For example, tannins in the bark are used for making dye, and the foliage is used for cattle feed and has many medicinal properties. Black mangrove has long been used in coastal communities for insect repellent, throat ailments, and as a tonic or soap substitute (Duke, 1992). Black mangrove is reported to treat snakebite, stomach disorders, nausea, sprains and swellings. Black mangrove has also been reported to be used for symptoms of kidney disease, rheumatism, smallpox, asthma, epilepsy, typhoid, hepatitis, and diabetes (Rao *et al.*, 2022). The nectar-rich, fragrant white flowers serve as a valuable source for honey production that is prized by local beekeepers (Beehiveful, n.d.; Pino, 2012; Plantiary, n.d.; Subathra et al., 2017).

Status

Threatened or Endangered: Black mangrove is not listed as threatened or endangered (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2025). Black mangrove is currently listed as “least concern” of extinction by the IUCN red list, but populations are decreasing due to habitat loss from human activity.

Wetland Indicator: Black mangrove is an obligate wetland indicator in the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Plain, the Caribbean and the Great Plains.

Weedy or Invasive: Currently, no evidence of invasiveness has been exhibited. This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, state natural resource, or state agriculture department regarding its status and use.

Please consult the PLANTS Web site (<http://plants.usda.gov/>) and your state’s Department of Natural Resources for this plant’s status (e.g., threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Planting Guidelines

Black mangroves establish best in intertidal zones of subtropical and tropical regions, particularly in brackish to saline soils, as found along the Louisiana Gulf Coast. Soil may range from muck to sandy substrates consistent with black mangrove distribution across upland intertidal elevations (Florida DEP, 2024). Collect propagules during fall (October-early December) and soak to remove the pericarp. Sow promptly in moist media since seeds are recalcitrant and can lose viability in approximately 3-4 weeks. Growout in planting tubes or pots until seedlings are robust enough for direct planting, following established nursery propagation practices (Biology Insights, 2025). Care should be taken not to allow seedlings to become root bound. Select healthy seedlings aged two to three years (approximately 18" tall), which provide adequate underground root systems crucial for sediment stabilization and wave energy reduction. Site preparation should ensure tidal fluctuation periodically covers the root collar. Consider installing wave barriers or anchoring systems in high-energy zones until pneumatophores are well established, as mangrove structures significantly reduce wave energy (Biology Insights, 2026; Engineering With Nature, 2021). Plant at sufficient spacing to allow pneumatophore development without competition, typically 5-10 feet apart for marsh restoration, in line with ecosystem-based mangrove restoration guidelines (Global Mangrove Alliance, 2023). Monitor and avoid cold exposure, as black mangroves are sensitive to freezing temperatures, showing damage beginning near -4°C (24°F) and mortality near -7°C (19.4°F) (Osland et al., 2020).

Management

There is no data on managing native black mangrove stands. Along the Gulf coast, the range of black mangrove is "managed" by winter temperatures. During a single freezing event black mangrove will recover, whereas multiple freezing events can cause death of black mangrove stands (Patterson et al., 1993; Stevens et al., 2006).

Pests and Potential Problems

Black mangrove is affected by several key pest and disease agents, including the leaf-mining fly *Liriomyza avicenniae*, which creates serpentine or blotch mines that reduce photosynthetic capacity (Feldman, 2019; Martinez & Etienne, 2002); sap-feeding scale insects that extract phloem sap and promote chlorosis and sooty mold development; and wood-boring insects, which damage vascular tissues and contribute to branch mortality and canopy loss (Feller, 2002). Additionally, soil-borne oomycetes such as *Phytophthora* spp. cause root and crown rot under prolonged saturation, producing wilting, chlorosis, and root decay (LSU AgCenter, 2025; NC State Extension, 2026; UC IPM, 2025). Fungal pathogens such as *Phyllosticta hibiscina* have been linked to necrotic leaf disease in *A. germinans* (Rafael & Calumpang, 1975).

Environmental Concerns

Black mangrove has persisted in the intertidal marsh and is a valuable component of the ecosystem. Loss of black mangrove is a concern as it is a woody species that persists and assists in habitat development and in breaking wave energy and adds nesting habitat for birds including pelicans (Tomlinson, 1986).

Black mangrove is expanding into temperate salt marshes as winters warm, altering carbon and nitrogen dynamics by increasing aboveground nutrient storage and reducing pore-water nitrogen through higher uptake (Macy et al., 2020). Established stands can also reduce marsh-edge erosion by up to 60%, though young stands offer limited protection (Rabalais et al., 2026). This shift from marsh to mangrove changes habitat structure and associated faunal communities (Osland et al., 2020) and can heighten sensitivity to nutrient enrichment due to local nitrogen or phosphorus limitation (Feller et al., 2007). While the species provides erosion control and nutrient filtration, its climate-driven expansion raises management concerns for long-term wetland function. Perry and Mendelssohn (2009) reported that expansion of black mangrove into salt marshes had no major effect on salt marsh ecosystems.

Control

Control of black mangrove is most effectively achieved through integrated management combining mechanical, chemical, and cultural methods. Mechanical trimming during the winter dormancy period reduces physiological stress and enables precise removal of problematic branches while minimizing disturbance to pneumatophores and sediment-stabilizing root structures (ForwardPlant, 2026; PictureThis, 2025). Coastal management guidelines emphasize conservative trimming because excessive removal can diminish shoreline stabilization functions, reduce habitat quality, and undermine overall ecosystem resilience (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2026; Medina-Irizarry & Andreu, 2021). Cultural methods including hydrologic manipulation, prescribed burning, and grazing, limit mangrove expansion by altering competitive conditions within wetland systems (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2021). Used together within an

integrated management framework, these approaches effectively reduce black mangrove density while maintaining the ecological integrity of coastal wetlands.

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

Seeds and Plant Production

Black mangrove reproduces through cryptovivipary, in which embryos germinate while still attached to the parent tree and develop into buoyant propagules that disperse by water (Alleman & Hester, 2011; Mangrove Reproduction, n.d.). These propagules require an obligate dispersal period of approximately 14 days and may remain afloat for up to 110 days, although prolonged floating reduces establishment success (Mangrove Reproduction, n.d.). In propagation settings where seeds are collected, seeds must be used fresh because black mangrove propagules are recalcitrant and lose viability within 3-4 weeks. Recommended nursery practices include soaking the propagule, removing the pericarp, and planting it in commercial potting media (Thomassie et al., 2016).

Black mangrove can be propagated vegetatively through stem cuttings, although success rates under current methodologies remain modest. A study conducted at the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center (Louisiana) evaluated first-year, second year, and mature (>4-year-old) stem cuttings treated with varied concentrations of a commercial rooting hormone (Dip'N Grow) and an untreated control. Although rooting initiation was delayed until the fourth week, the highest rooting occurrence, approximately 19.4%, was observed between the seventh and eighth weeks of growth post-cutting regardless of stem age or treatment. The untreated control did not differ than the three treatments of rooting hormone of 1:5, 1:10, and 1:20 rooting hormone to parts water. Despite the low frequency of successful rooting, these findings suggest that vegetative propagation is a likely alternative to seed-based methods, particularly for year-round cultivation and restoration of clonal genotypes. The research recommends further optimization of cutting age, size, hormone concentration, and rooting duration in subsequent trials (Thomassie et al., 2016). Complementary anecdotal and horticultural accounts also report that black mangrove cuttings placed in humid, saline substrates during warmer seasons can successfully root, reinforcing the potential of this approach for genetic conservation and restoration initiatives (PictureThis, n.d.). Although vegetative propagation through cuttings is possible, inconsistent rooting success makes propagule-based propagation the preferred method for large-scale production (ForwardPlant, 2026; Thomassie et al., 2016).

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Pelican Germplasm black mangrove is a pre-varietal source-identified release from the USDA NRCS Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center, Galliano, Louisiana. It was selected for its ability to stabilize soils with its extensive root systems, contributions to the detrital cycle, and it provides habitat for brown pelicans and other shorebirds. Also, it provides a plant for soil conservation in brackish and saltwater marshes.

Cultivars should be selected based on the local climate, resistance to local pests, and intended use. Consult with your local land grant university, local extension or local USDA NRCS office for recommendations on adapted cultivars for use in your area.

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