

Coastal Landscaping in Massachusetts

Plant List

This PDF document provides additional information to supplement the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) [Coastal Landscaping website](#).

The plants listed below are good choices for the rugged coastal conditions of Massachusetts. The Coastal Beach Plant List, Coastal Dune Plant List, and Coastal Bank Plant List give recommended species for each specified location (some species overlap because they thrive in various conditions). Photos and descriptions of selected species can be found on the following pages:

- [Grasses and Perennials](#)
- [Shrubs and Groundcovers](#)
- [Trees](#)

CZM recommends using native plants wherever possible. The vast majority of the plants listed below are native (which, for purposes of this fact sheet, means they occur naturally in eastern Massachusetts). Certain non-native species with specific coastal landscaping advantages that are not known to be invasive have also been listed. These plants are labeled “not native,” and their state or country of origin is provided. (See definitions for *native plant species* and *non-native plant species* at the end of this fact sheet.)

Coastal Beach Plant List

Plant List for Sheltered Intertidal Areas

Sheltered intertidal areas (between the low-tide and high-tide line) of beach, marsh, and even rocky environments are home to particular plant species that can tolerate extreme fluctuations in water, salinity, and temperature. The following plants are appropriate for these conditions along the Massachusetts coast.

Black Grass (<i>Juncus gerardii</i>)	native
Marsh Elder (<i>Iva frutescens</i>)	native
Saltmarsh Cordgrass (<i>Spartina alterniflora</i>)	native
Saltmeadow Cordgrass (<i>Spartina patens</i>)	native
Sea Lavender (<i>Limonium carolinianum</i> or <i>nashii</i>)	native
Spike Grass (<i>Distichlis spicata</i>)	native
Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)	native

Plant List for a Dry Beach

Dry beach areas are home to plants that can tolerate wind, wind-blown sand, salt spray, and regular interaction with waves and flood waters. Certain plants actually thrive on accumulations of sand to help them grow. The plants listed below are appropriate for dry beach conditions in Massachusetts.

American Beachgrass (<i>Ammophila breviligulata</i>)	native
Beach Pea (<i>Lathyrus japonicus</i>)	native
Saltmeadow Cordgrass (<i>Spartina patens</i>)	native
Sea Rocket (<i>Cakile edentula</i>)	native
Seabeach Sandwort (<i>Honckenya peploides</i>)	native
Seaside Goldenrod (<i>Solidago sempervirens</i>)	native

Coastal Dune Plant List

Plant List for Exposed Areas of a Coastal Dune

Fronting dunes and exposed secondary dunes are habitat for plant species that can tolerate wind, wind-blown sand, and salt spray; endure interaction with waves and flooding; and often even thrive on sand inundation. The plants listed below, as well as those listed above for Dry Beach areas, are appropriate for these environments along the Massachusetts coast.

American Beachgrass (<i>Ammophila breviligulata</i>)	native
American Dunegrass (<i>Leymus mollis</i>)	native
Beach Heather (<i>Hudsonia tomentosa</i>)	native

Plant List for More Sheltered Areas of a Coastal Dune

More protected secondary dunes are able to host a greater variety of plant species, because they are more sheltered from wind, salt-spray, and wave action. The plants listed below, as well as those listed above for Exposed Areas of a Coastal Dune, are appropriate for these more sheltered dune environments in Massachusetts.

Grasses, Perennials, and Vines

Black Grass (<i>Juncus gerardii</i>)	native
Coastal Panic Grass (<i>Panicum amarum</i> var. <i>amarulum</i>)	not native; native to New Jersey south to Mexico
Eastern Showy Aster (<i>Eurybia spectabilis</i>)	native
Saltmeadow Cordgrass (<i>Spartina patens</i>)	native
Sea Lavender (<i>Limonium carolinianum</i> or <i>nashii</i>)	native
Spike Grass (<i>Distichlis spicata</i>)	native
Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)	native
Virginia Creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>)	native

Shrubs and Groundcovers

Beach Plum (<i>Prunus maritima</i>)	native
Bearberry (<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>)	native
Common Juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>)	native
Large Cranberry (<i>Vaccinium macrocarpon</i>)	native
Lowbush Blueberry (<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>)	native
Northern Bayberry (<i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>)	native
Red Chokeberry (<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>)	native
Sweet Fern (<i>Comptonia peregrina</i>)	native
Virginia Rose (<i>Rosa virginiana</i>)	native

Trees

Black Cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	native
Downy Serviceberry/Shadbush (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	native
Eastern Red Cedar (<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>)	native
Gray Birch (<i>Betula populifolia</i>)	native
Pitch Pine (<i>Pinus rigida</i>)	native
White Oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>) and other <i>Quercus</i> species	White Oak is native; some species not native

Coastal Bank Plant List

Plant List for Exposed Areas of a Coastal Bank

The top and face of the coastal bank is where the landform is most exposed to wind, salt spray, and storm waves. The plants listed below are appropriate for the rugged conditions of an exposed coastal bank in Massachusetts.

Grasses, Perennials, and Vines

American Beachgrass (<i>Ammophila breviligulata</i>)	native
Coastal Panic Grass (<i>Panicum amarum</i> var. <i>amarulum</i>)	not native; native to New Jersey south to Mexico
Saltmeadow Cordgrass (<i>Spartina patens</i>)	native
Seaside Goldenrod (<i>Solidago sempervivens</i>)	native
Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)	native
Virginia Creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>)	native

Shrubs and Groundcovers

Beach Heather (<i>Hudsonia tomentosa</i>)	native
Beach Plum (<i>Prunus maritima</i>)	native
Bearberry (<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>)	native
Common Juniper (<i>Juniperus communis</i>)	native
Marsh Elder (<i>Iva frutescens</i>)	native
Northern Bayberry (<i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>)	native
Sweet Fern (<i>Comptonia peregrina</i>)	native

Trees (only plant on low slopes or set back from the top of the bank)

Black Cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	native
Eastern Red Cedar (<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>)	native
Pitch Pine (<i>Pinus rigida</i>)	native
White Oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>) and other <i>Quercus</i> species	White Oak is native; some species not native

Plant List for More Sheltered Areas of a Coastal Bank

Areas landward of the top of coastal bank are more protected from wave action, but may still be significantly affected by wind and salt spray. The plants listed below, as well as those listed above for Exposed Areas of a Coastal Bank, are appropriate for these more protected areas of the coastal bank in Massachusetts.

Grasses, Perennials, and Vines

Big Bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>)	native
Daylily (<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp.)	not native; native to Eurasia, including China, Korea, and Japan
Eastern Showy Aster (<i>Eurybia spectabilis</i>)	native
Indian Grass (<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>)	native
Little Bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	native
Pennsylvania Sedge (<i>Carex pensylvanica</i>)	native
Pink Tickseed (<i>Coreopsis rosea</i>)	native
Poverty Dropseed (<i>Sporobolus vaginiflorus</i>)	native
Purple Lovegrass (<i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i>)	native
Red Columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)	native

Red Fescue (<i>Festuca rubra</i> ssp. <i>rubra</i>)	native
St. Johnswort (<i>Hypericum</i> spp.)	some native
Sweet Goldenrod (<i>Solidago odora</i>)	native
Wavy Hairgrass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>)	native

Shrubs and Groundcovers

Arrowwood Viburnum (<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>)	native
Bigleaf Hydrangea (<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>)	not native; native to Japan
Black Chokeberry (<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>)	native
Downy Serviceberry/Shadbush (<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>)	native
Eastern Ninebark (<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>)	not native; native to New York south to Florida and the Midwest
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)	native
Highbush Blueberry (<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>)	native
Inkberry (<i>Ilex glabra</i>)	native
Lowbush Blueberry (<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>)	native
Nannyberry (<i>Viburnum lentago</i>)	native
New Jersey Tea (<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>)	native
Red Chokeberry (<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>)	native
Shrubby Cinquefoil (<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>)	native
Sweet Pepperbush (<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>)	native
Viburnum, various species (<i>Viburnum</i> spp.)	some native
Virginia Rose (<i>Rosa virginiana</i>)	native
Wild Raisin (<i>Viburnum cassinoides</i>)	native
Winterberry (<i>Ilex verticillata</i>)	native

Trees

American Holly (<i>Ilex opaca</i>)	native
Atlantic White Cedar (<i>Chamaecyparis thyoides</i>)	native
Black Tupelo (<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>)	native
Gray Birch (<i>Betula populifolia</i>)	native
Green Ash (<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>)	native
Red Maple (<i>Acer rubrum</i>)	native
Sassafras (<i>Sassafras albidum</i>)	native
Willow, various species (<i>Salix</i> spp.)	some native

More Information

For more information about many of the plants that are listed above, visit:

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) [PLANTS Database](#)
- University of Connecticut (UConn) [Plant Database of Trees, Shrubs, and Vines](#)
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center [Plant Database](#)
- Native Plant Trust's [Go Botany website](#)

The native status of each plant was determined by using [The Vascular Plants of Massachusetts: A County Checklist CD](#) published by the [Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program](#).

Caution with a Very Common Coastal Plant - *Rosa Rugosa*

Rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*) is considered to be non-native (native to eastern Asia) and potentially invasive in some regions or habitats of Massachusetts and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Though the shrub is extremely tolerant of sea spray and effective at directing pedestrian access away from dunes, it has the ability to form dense thickets that shade and outcompete other native bank, beach, and dune plants. Rugosa rose can also spread vigorously through both seed dispersal (carried by the rose hips) and underground rhizomes. Therefore, care should be taken when considering planting rugosa rose on coastal properties.



Definitions of Native and Non-Native Plant Species

A **native plant species** is a plant that is considered indigenous and naturally occurring to the region since pre-Colonial times (before 1500) or arriving more recently without human intervention. For purposes of this plant list, a native plant is one that occurs naturally in eastern Massachusetts.

A **non-native plant species** is a plant that is non-indigenous and not naturally occurring to the region. (For purposes of this plant list, the region is eastern Massachusetts with an emphasis on the coastal environments.) When non-native species enter into an ecosystem, they have the potential to disrupt the natural balance, reduce biodiversity, degrade habitats, alter native genetic diversity, and transmit exotic diseases to native species. However, not all non-native plants are invasive. Non-native plants that are not considered invasive are those that generally do not rapidly disperse, become established, or create self-sustaining or dominant populations that would be disruptive to the natural ecosystem. CZM recommends the use of natives wherever possible but has included certain non-native species in this list that have specific coastal landscaping advantages and no known environmental impacts. Be sure to check the [Coastal Landscaping - Links to Additional Resources page](#) for the most recent sources of invasive species information.