Sesuvium portulacastrum
Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

Sea Purslane is a native, herbaceous perennial found along the coasts of Florida (Fig. 1). It grows on the ocean side of the dunes down to the high tide mark. The thick, fleshy leaves are borne on succulent, reddish-green stems that branch regularly forming dense stands close to the ground. Small, showy pink flowers are borne more or less continually throughout the year. Each flower opens for only a few hours each day. These plants help build the dunes by catching sand in between stems and leaves. The plant is closely related to the more familiar Purslane commonly found in garden centers.

General Information

Scientific name: Sesuvium portulacastrum
Pronunciation: sess-SOO-vee-um por-too-luh-KASS-strum
Common name(s): Sea Purslane
Family: Portulaceae
Plant type: herbaceous; ground cover
USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: ground cover
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description

Height: .5 to 1 feet
Spread: depends upon supporting structure

Figure 1. Sea Purslane.

Plant habit: spreading
Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

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Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: entire  
Leaf shape: linear  
Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen  
Leaf blade length: less than 2 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no fall color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy  

Flower  
Flower color: pink  
Flower characteristic: year-round flowering  

Fruit  
Fruit shape: elongated  
Fruit length: less than .5 inch  
Fruit cover: dry or hard  
Fruit color: unknown  
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy  

Trunk and Branches  
Trunk/bark/branches: not applicable  
Current year stem/twig color: reddish  
Current year stem/twig thickness: thick  

Culture  
Light requirement: plant grows in full sun  
Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand;  
Drought tolerance: high  
Soil salt tolerances: good  
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches  

Other  
Roots: not applicable  
Winter interest: no special winter interest  
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
Invasive potential: aggressive, spreading plant  
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant  

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Use and Management

Sea Purslane is best when planted as a ground cover in a sandy, well-drained soil in the full sun. Virtually no irrigation or fertilizer is needed once the plant is established in the landscape. In many ways it defines a low maintenance plant. It is resistant to the wind and salty air common along the coast. It is not suited for planting in the partial shade. It could be located in a sunny spot inland in a sandy soil provided the soil drains well.

Pests and Diseases

No problems are associated with this plant if it is located in the full sun in a well-drained soil.