

BEACH MORNING GLORY – A GREAT GROUNDCOVER FOR THE COAST

You have probably seen this plant at local beaches or even planted as a groundcover at the north end entrance of the Gilchrist Bridge along U.S. 41. The beach morning glory, or railroad vine, is an interesting, fast-growing vine that is particularly well-adapted to coastal areas in our county. In addition to the evergreen vines, the morning glory-like flowers in summer and fall add to the usefulness of this native plant. Let's take a closer look at this quick-growing groundcover.

Growing only about six inches tall, the beach morning glory can span across the ground to a length of 75-100 feet. The thick, half-inch stems occasionally branch as they grow and regularly root at the nodes. The double-lobbed leaves are thick and fleshy and range in size from two and one-half to four inches long. The funnel-shaped morning glory flowers are pink to purple in color with purple-red throats. The flowers can appear year-round, but are at their best from May to November in our area. Just like others in the morning glory family, the individual flowers open in the morning and shrivel by afternoon. The flowers are followed by seedpods which contain four seeds.

To see a railroad vine stretched across an expanse of sand dune is quite impressive. Few other plants can take the salty, hot and windy environment like the beach morning glory. Doing well in

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poor, sandy soils, the roots of this vine are extensive and help stabilize sandy, dune conditions. In fact, the roots can grow to be 10 feet long and two-inches in diameter.

If you have a site suitable for the beach morning glory, establish this plant anytime from March through October. Set plants about three feet apart in the planting bed and water until established making sure that these vines are not over-watered. Normal rainfall should take care of established plants from then on. It may take two to three years to develop a relatively solid stand of this open-growth habit plant. Out-of-bound vines can be directed back into the planting bed to quicken the rate of coverage. Extra long vines

can also be pruned and propagated by cuttings to obtain more plants. The beach morning glory can be propagated by seed as well. Cultivated planting stock may be obtained at local or regional native plant nurseries in our area.

Look around and you will probably see more and more beach morning glory used in coastal plantings to beautify landscapes and stabilize coastal sites.

Resources:

- Gilman, E.F. (2007) *Ipomoea pes-caprae* Beach Morning Glory. UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Christman, S. (2000) *Ipomoea pes-caprae*. *Floridata*: Tallahassee, FL.
- Brown, S.H., Hazell, J. & Coopriider, K. (2009) *Ipomoea pes-caprae*. Lee County UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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