

Sawgrass

Cladium jamaicense



Description:

Sawgrass is actually sedge, not a true grass, of fresh and brackish marshes, commonly reaching heights of 6 to 8 feet. The plant gets its name from the saw-like teeth on the leaf margins. Sawgrass often grows in dense strands and the normal mode of reproduction is vegetative through an extensive rhizome system.

Habitat:

Sawgrass marshes are the dominant vegetation community, which comprise approximately 65 to 70 percent of the total vegetation coverage of the Everglades. It also occurs throughout the southeastern U.S. growing in fresh and brackish water wetlands where it provides food and shelter to wading birds and other animals. It can be found throughout Florida and its range extends north to Virginia and west to Southern Texas.

Sawgrass grows primarily in shallow freshwater marshes although it can grow in, and may even dominate, some brackish water areas. It grows best on seasonally flooded sites that are inundated for 6 to 9 months to depths of about a foot.

Sawgrass grows best on deep organic soils although it can also grow in marl soils or in small solution holes in rocky areas. It has extremely low nutrient requirements and in fact, when nutrient levels rise, or hydroperiods change, sawgrass is often replaced by other vegetation. A good example of this is the loss of sawgrass marsh to cattail invasion in many areas of the Everglades system.

Importance to Wildlife:

Sawgrass leaves are not used as food for local wildlife, however, the seeds are eaten by several bird species and the starchy roots are sometimes eaten by wild hogs and bears. The nearly total dominance of this species is one of the distinguishing features of the Everglades.