

CORDGRASS

Spartina spp.

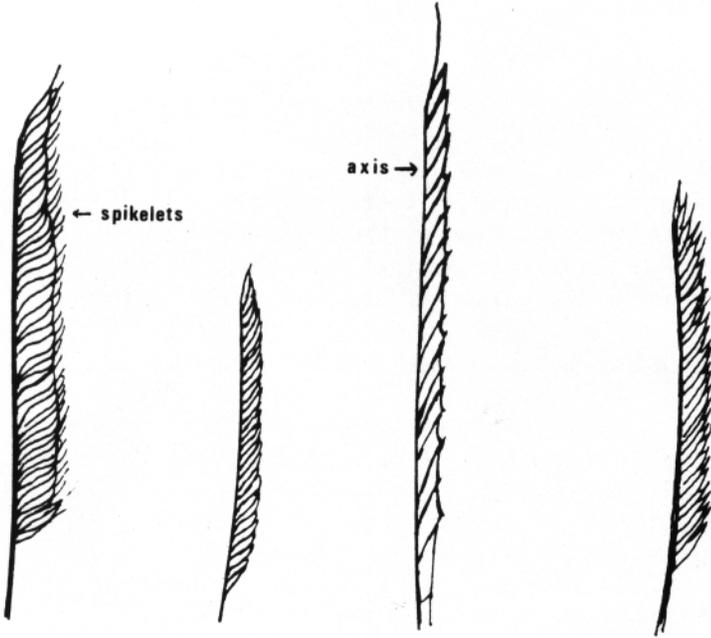
Four species of the genus *Spartina* are found within the North Atlantic Division. These species are among the most important members of the saltmarsh community. As with most marsh species local variations in size and vigor occur depending upon soil, water and climatic conditions.

To a great extent, the species composition of a salt-water marsh will depend upon its elevation in relation to tidal flux. Areas that are flooded daily, often consist of almost pure stands of *S. alterniflora*. In those areas of tidal inundation but with brackish water, *S. cynosuroides* and *S. pectinata* may be common. *S. pectinata* also may be found in freshwater marshes and less-wet places. *S. patens* is often found in the zone from mean high water level to the maximum height of spring and storm tides.

All of these species are valuable sources of detritus in the marine food web. Because of the more extensive rate of flushing in the zone below mean high water, however, the *S. alterniflora* community probably provides the greatest nutritive input into the detrital food web. In addition, the vegetation serves as cover for numerous invertebrates and vertebrates, and is key factor in controlling coastal erosion.

A common identifying characteristic of these four species is the branch structure of the flower clusters. As depicted in figure 2. The flattened spikelets originate from only one side of the branches' axis in all of these species.

Spartina spp.



pectinata

patens

alterniflora

cynosuroides

Notes

(after Hotchkiss)