
Wildflower Spot – November 2013
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

MARSH ELDER

Iva frutescens

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This bushy-branched shrub is recognized by thick, paired leaves with toothed edges, tapering at both ends. Inconspicuous greenish flowers are surrounded by tiny leaf-like appendages; they appear as green (later brown) spheres arranged on the ends of stems. The shrub grows to 8 feet tall and the branches are often killed back during severe winters. Marsh Elder is often confused with Silverling (*Baccharis halimifolia*) which has coarsely-toothed leaves alternate (not opposite) on the stem.

Well named for its location, Marsh Elder is common in brackish or saltwater habitats such as marsh margins and mud flats. The range is from Nova Scotia to eastern Texas. Growing only in the coastal counties of Virginia, an alternate common name is High-tide Bush. Blooms August-November.

Iva is an old name for some medicinal plant; *frutescens* means “shrubby.” During extreme high tides, both small mammals and birds use



Marsh Elder as a refuge, and the dense growth habit provides nesting sites for various species of birds. ❖

Photo: Marsh Elder (*Iva frutescens*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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