

2013
February Plant of the Month



Big Cordgrass
***Spartina cynosuroides* (L.) Roth**

In the aftermath of 2012's autumn super storm Sandy, it is abundantly clear the areas with natural shoreline vegetation weathered the waves and influx of saline water better than those that did not. Part of that natural shoreline was anchored with native wetland grasses, one of which is the native tall cordgrass, *Spartina cynosuroides*.

Big cordgrass is found in New Jersey on the brackish water marshes of the Atlantic coast and Delaware Bay tide marshes. Big cord grass occupies waters with salinity less than about 15 ppt (parts per thousand). It is of similar height and form as the widespread invasive *Phragmites*, yet it has none of its bad qualities. This brackish water species is colonial and it is that feature that helps make it an effective shoreline protection plant. Large stands of tall cord grass can be found along the Mullica River in the vicinity of Hog Island, along the Great Egg Harbor upstream of Scullville and in the Maurice River drainage between Buckshutem and Leesburg. Wherever it is established, it is part of a mixed marsh, along with *Phragmites*, three-square or chair makers sedge and the broad-leaf and narrow-leaf cattail. Each species have similar creeping roots and widespread colonies that act as a woven blanket protection making storm surges and floods less damaging as it would be to single stem or annual species.

Big cordgrass is visible all year long. Even in depths of winter, such as this February, one can find last year's stems and seed heads (see photo above). So if the cabin fever has you in its grip, take a ride to your nearest brackish marsh and see the remnants of this magnificent grass and see how it has weather the storm.