

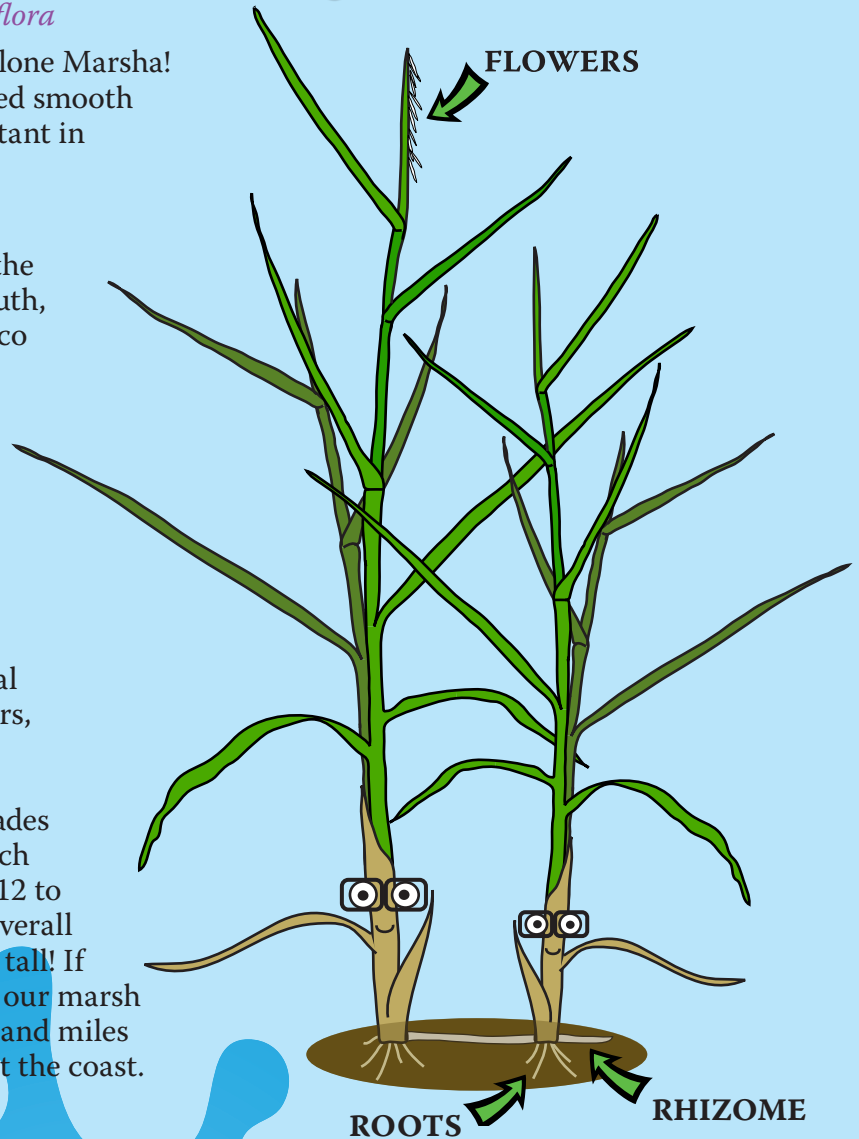
# MARSHALL AND MARSHA MARSHGRASS

Scientific name: *Spartina alterniflora*

Hi! I'm Marshall, and this is my clone Marsha! We are a type of marshgrass called smooth cordgrass, and we're really important in coastal marshes!

We are found bordering coastal marshes from Newfoundland in the north to central Florida in the south, and throughout the Gulf of Mexico from the Panhandle region of Florida to Texas.

We produce small, white flowers that turn into seeds each fall, but primarily we spread by our rhizomes. A rhizome is a runner that is found underground from which new shoots and roots emerge. Rhizomes from individual plants can grow for years and years, infinitely increasing in size. Soft stems emerge from the rhizome and from those stems, the leaf blades are produced. Our leaf blades reach a length of 30 to 50 centimeters (12 to 20 inches), and we can reach an overall height of up to 2.1 meters (7 feet) tall! If you are lucky, you will see us and our marsh grass friends extending for miles and miles along the shoreline when you visit the coast.



## Fun Fact:

We are considered Halophytes. *Halo-* is the Greek word for salt, *-phyte* is the Greek word for plant.

We help absorb wave energy, which prevents storm damage from occurring further inland. As we grow along the water's edge in the intertidal zone, we also collect sediment to maintain and build up our shoreline. As the sediment accumulates, it not only creates a stable shoreline, but it also provides a place for species like ribbed mussels and oysters to settle and grow. Our shoots and rhizomes also provide shelter and food for a number of species of birds, mammals, fishes, fiddler crabs, and less obvious organisms, like brittle stars and tube worms.

If we spend too much time completely or mostly underwater, then we are less successful at photosynthesis (how plants make their own food from sunlight) and the sediment around our roots is more likely to wash away, making it impossible for us to stand tall. Hence, scientists are very concerned about our survival as sea levels begin to rise. They are busy running experiments to determine how much time we can handle being submerged underwater. While it is true that our rhizomes can grow and extend into shallower waters, with rising tides, all too soon in many places we will hit hard structures like sea walls, homes, or roads and not be able to continue to spread. What will we do then?

**Fun Fact:**

If you take a close look at our leaves, you can often see crystals of salt on them.

S	W	R	T	H	S	A	R	J	O	P	H	I	Y	H
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I	G	A	X	S	A	W	Q	Z	C	V	B	I	B	L
N	F	M	R	C	H	O	R	B	N	U	P	S	K	O
T	M	V	P	G	H	Y	R	V	G	I	J	E	B	P
A	E	K	L	B	D	J	C	A	Q	W	X	H	A	H
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S	L	Q	O	T	Y	X	W	R	G	I	O	H	M	P
L	L	A	H	R	D	G	K	P	L	N	M	P	C	S

Find these words that are associated with *Spartina alterniflora*:

MARSHA MARSHALL CLONE HALOPHYTE

SMOOTH CORDGRASS RHIZOME INTERTIDAL PHOTOSYNTHESIS

