



**Beach Rose** (*Rosa rugosa*). This rugged rose is a dense shrub (2 to 6 ft tall) that can form thickets sometimes on dunes or behind the dunes. With purple to pink (and sometimes white) flowers and bright red fruits called rose hips, these roses are commonly associated with beaches in Connecticut. However, they are actually not native and were introduced to North America in the late 1700's and rapidly spread along the New England coast. Leaves occur alternately along the stem with each leaf composed of 5 to 9 leaflets. The leaves are dark green, shiny and appear "wrinkled" along the veins. Branches and stems are densely covered in straight (not curving) prickles. Beach rose is considered potentially invasive along the coast, but there are two native roses that you may find on the beaches as well, Virginia rose and Carolina rose. These native roses do not have wrinkled leaves.



**American Sea-rocket** (*Cakile edentula*). This herbaceous plant is usually an annual in New England (but can be a biennial further south). The thick, succulent leaves grow alternately along the stem and are usually slightly toothed. The name comes from the rocket shaped seed capsule.



**Coastal Jointed Knotweed** (*Polygonum articulatum*) This annual plant has slender wiry stems and is jointed with slightly swollen nodes. The leaves grow alternately along the stem and are narrow, with leaf edges curled under and only about an inch or less in length. It grows in dry, open, sandy areas and is found along the coast as well as further inland.



**Seaside Spurge or Sandmat** (*Euphorbia polygonifolia*) This prostrate, annual plant grows on sandy beaches and dunes. The opposite leaves along the stem are less than 0.5 in long, but the flat growth form can form a large clump on the sand. This plant is easily identified by the stems that turn red during the summer months. Care should be taken in picking this plant as the stems contain a latex that can cause a rash.



## NIANTIC BEACHES LIVING ECOSYSTEM PROJECT BEACH PLANTS OF NIANTIC



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Plants play an important role on our beaches and dunes. They help trap sand and control erosion while also providing habitat, shade, and food for many animals, from butterflies to birds. Because many of them are fragile or play an important part within the beach ecosystem, it is important not to trample or pick the leaves or flowers.



**American Beach Grass** (*Ammophila breviligulata*) is the most common plant that you're likely to see on the beaches of Niantic. This tall grass grows on sand ridges and dunes and spreads via rhizomes (or underground stems). As sand buries the rhizomes, vertical growth is stimulated and the plants spread. Sometimes you can follow a line of grass shoots growing in the sand that are actually all connected.



**Beach Pea** (*Lathyrus japonicus*) grows on the dune and can spread onto the beach with its low growing, sprawling stems. Like beach grass, it also spreads by rhizomes. This pea has waxy leaves in an alternate pattern along the stem. Leaves are divided into 6 to 12 pairs of leaflets along the stem. The flowers are blue to purple and can be found throughout the summer. The seed pods are one to two inches long and contain seeds that can float and survive in salt water for several years.



**Poison Ivy** (*Toxicodendron radicans*) seems to be able to survive anywhere, and it thrives on sandy dunes. Recognizable by its leaves made up of three leaflets, this plant can grow as a vine or upright shrub. The leaves grow alternately along the stem, and poison ivy has no thorns. The leaves are often a glossy green when young, turning bright red in the fall. Greyish white berries appear in the fall as well. Poison ivy is eaten by many animals, and birds often feed on the ripe fruits in the fall. Touching any part of the plant can cause a rash caused by urushiol, an oily liquid found in the plants' sap.



**Seaside Goldenrod** (*Solidago sempervirens*) provides some bright golden yellow color along the beach. Feel the leaves of this plant – they are waxy and thick. This helps the plant to retain water and survive in an area with salt spray. The dark green leaves are arranged alternately along the stem and can be 8 to 10 in long. Flowers appear in the late summer to early fall. This goldenrod can tolerate high salinity and salt spray and drought – allowing it to grow well on sandy dunes. You may also find this plant growing on the edges of salt marshes. The flowers are an important nectar source for migrating monarch butterflies traveling along the Atlantic coast in the fall



**Saltwort** (*Salsola kali*). This bushy annual plant is non-native to coastal area of New England. The leaves are alternate along the stem and there is a spine on the leaf tip. With many branches, the plant is rounded in form and is usually from 1 to 3 ft in height.



**Rough Cocklebur** (*Xanthium strumarium*) is an annual plant that grows to a height of 2 to 4 ft. The leaves are alternately spaced along the stem and are roughly heart shaped. There are no spines on the plant, but the hairs on the leaves give it a sand paper like feel. The stems are often speckled with purple. The most characteristic feature of this plant is the burs one can find in the fall. These burs are dry fruits each containing 2 seeds. The hooks on the bur allow it to easily attach to animal fur for dispersal.



**Dusty Miller** (*Artemisia stelleriana*) This common ornamental garden plant has escaped cultivation and is now commonly found on sand dunes. The leaves are arranged alternately along the stem with the leaf edges lobed. The pale green leaves are covered with white, woolly hairs giving plants a characteristic "dusty" appearance.