

Plants, continued

looking like a smaller, ground-creeping Morning-Glory with pink or pink-striped flowers; the Beach Carrot (*Glehnia littoralis*), looking somewhat like Angelica creeping prostrate on the beach; or the Yellow Sand Verbena (*Abronia latifolia*), with small, fleshy, glistening leaves (reminiscent of "ice plants") and a cluster of small, bright yellow flowers.

On the lowest point on the beach slope, where patchy vegetation gives way to bare sand, only a very few, uniquely adapted plants can survive the severe salt, sand, and exposure. Among the small patches of Dunegrass and European Beachgrass, there is the American Searocket (*Cakile edentula*) with its fleshy, lobed leaves, small purplish-white flowers, and elongated, pulpy green fruits (roughly 1/2 inch long); its close relative, the introduced European Searocket (*Cakile maritima*) is common and more showy, with larger flowers, and more deeply lobed leaves. Also, this zone is home to the Seabeach Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*), growing in dense mats, with fleshy, bright green leaves growing symmetrically around short stalks, topped in the spring by small, greenish-white flowers.

On the northern Oregon coast, we do not yet have much Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), that awesomely spiny, invasive, and flammable relative of Scott's Broom with broom-like yellow flowers. Introduced from the British Isles (where it is sometimes used for hedgerows) Gorse has crowded out all other plants with vast, impenetrable, spiny thickets, covering the dunes and beach margins of the southern Oregon coast. Nitrogen-fixing nodules in its roots allow it to occupy marginal, sandy soils, while oil in its tissues allows gorse fires to burn hot and fast, like a grease fire, resistant to light dousings with water; Gorse was implicated in the 1914 and 1936s fires of Bandon, Oregon, both of which leveled that coastal town. Gorse's range is currently expanding on the coasts of Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. If you see any Gorse in the vicinity of Cannon Beach, dig it up. Find a secure place and burn it. Show no mercy.



Scotch Broom

Interested in a good plant guide for the coast? I would highly recommend *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast*, edited by Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon, and published in 1994 by Lone Pine Publishing in Redmond, Washington. This book features almost 800 plants (including those described above). It provides clear color photographs of plants, and descriptions of their appearance, habitat, and range; it also includes information regarding edible plants of the Northwest, and the uses of plants among Native Americans, historical and contemporary. Despite its British Columbia bias, the book provides a comprehensive overview of most of our common plants of the Oregon coast. Despite its organization (on the basis of botanical classifications, as opposed to readily-apparent characteristics such as flower color), amateur plant enthusiasts will still find this book easy to use. Anyone interested in growing wild plants in the garden might want to consult the foremost guidebook on the subject: *Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest* written by Arthur Kruckeberg, and published by the University of Washington Press in Seattle.

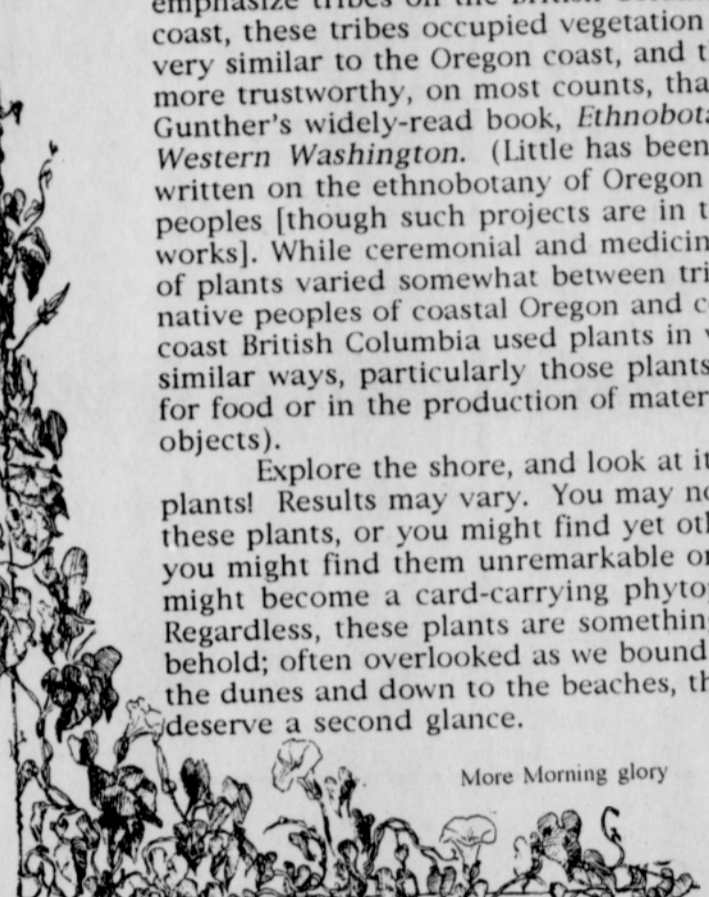
As explained before, many of the "wild" plants of the sandy margins are, in fact, introduced from Europe and elsewhere; most of these are accidentally introduced "weeds," uniquely adapted to harsh or turbulent environments. Interested in an informative overview of how such plants make intercontinental journeys, and what this means, environmentally? Try *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* by Alfred Crosby, published in 1986 by Cambridge University Press or, if you want to get back to the classics, try the entertaining and enlightening book, *Plants, Man, and Life* by Edgar Anderson, published in 1952 by the University of California Press. Or simply type the word "weeds" into the nearest computerized library catalogue for a host of other books.

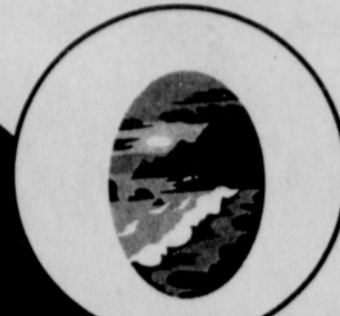
Many of the plants described here were used by local Native Americans (as foods, medicines, and so forth) in addition to the examples mentioned above. Interested in Native American uses of plants on this coast?

For a highly readable, and well illustrated summary, I recommend *Food Plants of Coastal First Peoples* by Nancy Turner, published in 1995 by the University of British Columbia Press in Vancouver. For those who want to dig even deeper into this topic, I would suggest two other books written by Nancy Turner and published by the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria: *Plants in British Columbia Indian Technology* (1979), and the more technical and comprehensive *Ethnobotany of the Ntinaht Indians of Vancouver Island* (1983). Though both books emphasize tribes on the British Columbia coast, these tribes occupied vegetation zones very similar to the Oregon coast, and they are more trustworthy, on most counts, than Erna Gunther's widely-read book, *Ethnobotany of Western Washington*. (Little has been written on the ethnobotany of Oregon coast peoples [though such projects are in the works]. While ceremonial and medicinal uses of plants varied somewhat between tribes, the native peoples of coastal Oregon and coastal British Columbia used plants in very similar ways, particularly those plants used for food or in the production of material objects).

Explore the shore, and look at its plants! Results may vary. You may not find these plants, or you might find yet others; you might find them unremarkable or you might become a card-carrying phytophile. Regardless, these plants are something to behold; often overlooked as we bound over the dunes and down to the beaches, they deserve a second glance.

More Morning glory





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The Dog Catcher's Wife
by T. Dunn
For Abie

Now I know I've become more than a little adamant on the subject, but do you ever really talk to yourself -- I mean talk aloud; maybe a muttered whisper of what's going on in your brain? You have to admit that it is freeing. Now imagine Myrtle. First just having that name. Second being the dogcatcher's wife. No, she doesn't have those pig tight overpermed curls -- just ordinary brown hair strewn with gray -- and no, she's not wall-eyed or squat. Just medium height and neat in her dress, ordinary being the operative word.

And when she married Norman he wasn't the dogcatcher. He was a nightwatchman at a business complex. She was a receptionist going to night school.

Of course they weren't well-to-do, but who is? So you might say that old Myrtle married into her legacy anyway. Her legacy being that of the dogcatcher's wife.

"Mea culpa," she mutters, farewelling her husband with a wave through the chain link fence. She doesn't know what mea culpa means, but she's heard of it and likes the sounds. She rounds on her heels and strides like the determined person she is -- to do chores. She hums a little tonelessly. She cleans like a demon. She whips her kitchen to the bones, proudly.

She speaks aloud. Home alone. In the grocery store. Overheard and responded to, she just shrugs down the aisle of the supermarket. If she really cared what people thought she'd exercise and give up fries, dye her hair. Instead, she spreads her comfort zone around her as the sheer proof of selfhood. She stood for something. She was the dogcatcher's wife. She was herself entire.

In literature as in love, we are astonished at what is chosen by others.
-Andre Maurois

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