
Prevent the spread of Beach Vitex (Vitex rotundifolia) in Virginia.

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in efforts to prevent the spread of Beach Vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*) in Virginia.

As you may know, Beach Vitex is a woody shrub native to the Pacific Rim that was first introduced in the Carolinas in the 1980's for beach stabilization. Since that time, however, it has become a major coastal problem for dozens of beach communities in both North and South Carolina. The magnitude of the problem is severe, and it has lead local- state, and federal agencies and organizations to form the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force to combat this invasive plant.

Beach Vitex is extremely salt resistant, drought tolerant and thrives in the open habitat of the coastal dune system. It also has a rapid growth rate. Although initially promising as a beach stabilizer, the dense cover of foliage produced by Beach Vitex chokes out native dune plants. Because it lacks the fibrous root system of native plants, it is less efficient at trapping sand and building dunes. In addition to threatening native dune building plants, Beach Vitex threatens other species once established on the ocean side of the dune, including various nesting shorebirds, as well as the loggerhead sea turtle, which is listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Those of you on the Eastern part of the state may recall a survey that staff in the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Office of Plant and Pest Services, conducted recently regarding the commercial availability of Beach Vitex. The impetus for the survey was the finding of Beach Vitex last summer in the Ciw of Norfolk, which city officials promptly isolated and treated. The survey indicated that Beach Vitex is not widely available in the horticultural trade, which is very encouraging news because collectively we can take proactive steps to keep this invasive plant out of the Commonwealth.

Although Beach Vitex is mainly a threat to Virginia's coastal environments, including beaches, dunes, and salt marshes, I am respectfully requesting all concerned nurserymen, dealers, landscapers, and citizens regardless of their location in the Commonwealth, voluntarily refrain from selling or distributing Beach Vitex. VDACS is actively monitoring this issue and, if necessary, will take regulatory action to list and treat Beach Vitex as a regulated noxious weed.

You can find a wealth of practical information at www.beachvitex.org the website of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. The website contains excellent research, public awareness information, and testing of eradication techniques that have been spearheaded by the Task Force. An informational bulletin that was prepared by the Task Force and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is enclosed.

Please feel free to contact VDACS' Office of Plant and Pest Services at (804) 786-3515 if you have any questions regarding this matter, and thank you for helping keep Beach Vitex out of Virginia.

Sincerely,

Todd P. Haymore, VDACS Commissioner of Agriculture

Beach Vitex Invades the Carolina Coast

Threatening Native Dune Plants and Sea Turtles

Beach vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*) is a deciduous, woody vine from Japan and Korea that was introduced to the southeastern U.S. in the mid-1980s as an ornamental landscape plant as well as for sand dune stabilization. Along the coast of North and South Carolina, beach vitex has escaped cultivation and covered oceanfront dunes. Beach vitex crowds out native dune plants such as sea oats, American beachgrass and seaside panicum. In addition, beach vitex threatens endangered loggerhead sea turtle nesting habitat as well as habitat for a federally threatened plant, seabeach amaranth and other rare species.



Photo by Dale Suiter



Photo by Melissa Hedges

Beach Vitex flowers (above);
Beach Vitex dominates a
section of sand dunes on
Bald Head Island, NC (right)



Photo by Dale Suiter

Sand dunes overtaken by beach vitex (above) in
contrast with adjacent dunes dominated by native plants
(right), Atlantic Beach, NC



Photo by Dale Suiter



Photo by Dale Suiter

Beach Vitex in Atlantic Beach, NC
(above) and in Emerald Isle, NC
(below)



Photo by Dale Suiter

Invasive Qualities of Beach Vitex:

- Drought and salt tolerant
- Fast growing
- Prolific seed producer
 - Birds eat seeds and aid in distribution
 - Seeds float and can be carried to other beaches
- Brittle stems break off during high tides, float away, root and colonize other beaches
- Seeds and cuttings that are chipped up and spread as mulch may start new populations



Photo by Dale Suiter



Photo by Betsy Brabson

Beach vitex at Debidue Beach, SC.

What can you do to help?

- Do not plant beach vitex.
- Notify the Beach Vitex Task Force of any populations that you find, including the street address or GPS coordinates.
- Contact the Beach Vitex Task Force to verify identification and obtain site specific advice on the removal of mature beach vitex colonies and replacement with native dune species.
- Until beach vitex can be professionally removed, you may consider doing the following:
 - Remove ripe fruits before dispersed by birds or water.
 - Trim back branches that may break off and float away.
 - Put all beach vitex clippings and seeds in a plastic trash bag so they will go to the landfill, rather than be chipped and spread as mulch.

For additional information or to help prevent the spread of beach vitex, please contact:
Melanie Doyle, NC Beach Vitex Task Force (910-458-8257 x 250 Melanie.Doyle@ncmail.net)
Dale Suiter, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (919-856-4520 x 18, Dale_Suiter@fws.gov)
Betsy Brabson, SC Beach Vitex Task Force (843-546-9531, wbrabson@sccoast.net)

