

RED MANGROVE

Rhizophora mangle

Take time to appreciate Mangroves--guardians of our shores. The Mangroves quietly and modestly provide for an orderly flow of life between land and sea. An integral part of both our marine and terrestrial environments, they not only are protectors of our shores from storms but also cradle the nursery of our seas.

In North America, there are only three species of mangroves: Red, Black, and White. They are “usually” found in this order: Red nearest the water, moving inland Black is next, then White on the highest ground.

Although one might tend to think that mangroves are from the same family, they are not. Three factors make each a mangrove: 1) they can tolerate wet feet; 2) they can handle saltwater; and 3) they are viviparous, meaning they produce living offspring—seeds germinate on the tree. You may tell the trees apart by looking for differences in leaves, bark, flowers, fruit, and sometimes location.

Here we have the native Red Mangrove:

- The leaf has a very smooth, shiny upper side that is bright green, with the underside a paler green.
- They have prop roots and drop roots that provide a gas exchange to the plant. These prop/drop roots are why this tree is often referred to as the “walking” tree.
- Red Mangroves exclude salt when absorbing brackish or saltwater.
- It has a small cream-colored flower that produces a small fruit.
- Once the seed in the fruit germinates on the tree, the propagule grows and stays with the tree until it is ready to take root and drop. Its propagule is pencil-shaped, can float for up to a year, and still be viable.
- This tree is the larval host for the Mangrove Skipper butterfly.
- Ecologically, the dense prop roots quell water motion and serve to prevent wave-induced erosion.

