

# POSTCARDS FROM PARADISE: SEPARATED LOVERS AND THE BEACH NAUPAKA

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To request a plant identification clarification, write to Roger (attn: "Postcards from Paradise") at the following address:  
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Austin and Doug Scofield succinctly describe the problem here in South Florida..... "schefflera is on the loose!"

Most frustrating to the land manager is the fact that schefflera is very difficult to kill with herbicides. A cut-stump treatment with 50% GARLON 3A (triclopyr) or 10% GARLON 4 is recommended. If a cut-stump application is not possible, apply a wide band of 10% GARLON 4 to the trunk of smaller individuals and 20% GARLON 4 on larger individuals (Langeland and Stocker, 1997). A re-treatment may be required after one year.

The take home message for the natural resource manager is not good. Schefflera is here to stay. Birds will always be vectors. Introducing biocontrols for such a popular ornamental will never be an option. Herbicides are only partially effective, and like most Australian plants, death by fire is no guarantee. Maybe if we start a rumor that schefflera attracts mosquitoes..... encephalitis-carrying mosquitoes.

## References

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The exotic *Scaevola sericea* has succulent, spoon-shaped, light green leaves. The fruit of this species is white.

Legend has it a beautiful Hawaiian woman's lover gave her a naupaka flower back in the days when it was a full flower. They had a quarrel and she tore the flower in half, telling him not to speak to her again until he found another flower. The gods became upset at her behavior, turned all of the naupaka flowers into half-flowers, and the two lovers remained separated while the man searched in vain for another whole flower. He died broken hearted. The half-flower shape is said to be, in Hawaiian lore, a reminder for lovers to be more tolerant of each other and to cherish their blessings of love.

The genus *Scaevola*, in the Goodeniaceae, or Goodenia Family, is comprised of 130 tropical species, mostly centered in Australia, but with one widespread, pantropical, coastal species, beach naupaka, *Scaevola sericea* (syn. *S. taccada*). Beach naupaka is a native constituent of the islands and coastal areas of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including Hawaii. Its seeds are viable for long periods and are capable of drifting in seawater for an extended time, utilizing favorable ocean currents to colonize far away beaches. Studies have shown that the seeds remain viable in seawater, but germinate only in freshwater, such as

when washed up on a rainy beach.

Principally through the nursery trade, beach naupaka has become pantropical in distribution, readily spreading from landscape plants into new coastal habitats far outside its historic natural range. It has become prevalent in the New World, most particularly Florida and the West Indies, but is found from Mexico southward to South America as well.

Beach naupaka is a multi-stemmed shrub that forms rounded mounds from three to six feet tall, but can attain 10 feet in height. The succulent, light green leaves are somewhat spoon-shaped and are produced near the branch tips. Clustered flowers are 5-lobed with white petals that are streaked with purple. Each flower is one-sided, giving the appearance that it has been cut in half. Two varieties of *Scaevola sericea* are cultivated; *S. sericea* var. *sericea* has pubescent leaves, and *S. sericea* var. *taccada* has smooth, glabrous leaves. Both produce round, pithy .5 inch white fruit that are buoyant in seawater.

Outside of its natural range, beach naupaka competes with native coastal vegetation and can quickly form extensive colonies, offering a seed source for more rapid dispersal to other shorelines. It has even managed to colonize remote areas, such as the pristine sandy shoreline of Cape Sable in Everglades National Park. In southern and central Florida, as well as in the West Indies, it competes directly with the closely related native inkberry *Scaevola plumieri*.

In Florida, *S. plumieri* is a rare species that has been recently placed on the state list of threatened species, principally due to rampant development of oceanfront properties. Its natural range in Florida extends from Pinellas and Hillsborough counties on the west coast, and Brevard county (Cape Canaveral) on the east coast, southward along the coast through the Florida Keys to the Dry Tortugas. Nowhere in Florida does it form extensive stands as are seen in the Bahamas and other parts of the West Indies.

Inkberry is easily recognized and should not be confused with the exotic beach naupaka. The most diagnostic features of the native inkberry are its stiff, glossy, dark green leaves (which closely resemble the cultivated *Peperomia obtusifolia*) and black fruit. It is a component of the coastal strand vegetation where it is often found growing directly on the frontline dunes.

One constant feature of the beach dune is that of movement and change. Change can be subtle one day, drastic the next. Plants that live on beach dunes must be extremely salt tolerant, decidedly wind and drought tolerant, and capable of surviving in nutrient-poor soils. They must have adaptations to survive shifting sands and even be capable of stabilizing beach sand from wind and storm surges. Inkberry successfully overcomes these environmental challenges.

Yet another exotic species has also recently made its way into the nursery trade in southern Florida, and that species is *Scaevola aemula*, a trailing groundcover with bright blue and yellow flowers. It is sold under the trade name "Blue Wonder." It does not seem to be very adapt-



*Scaevola sericea* flower.  
Photo by Patrick Lynch, SFWMD

able to the South Florida environment and is relatively short-lived in the landscape, perhaps due to overwatering and ensuing fungal problems. This species has not yet demonstrated and ability to escape cultivation in Florida but it is being planted as a groundcover on coastal areas and is a relatively popular plant or hanging baskets. Beach naupaka, however, is a distinct threat to native coastal vegetation in Florida and should be controlled whenever encountered in natural areas. This will do much to help preserve one of our most valuable natural resources - the beaches.

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