



Threats to seagrasses

- human activities on land
- anything that decreases water clarity
- fertilizers/pesticides entering the ocean
- nutrients entering the ocean
- sediments entering the ocean
- dredging and coastal development
- some boating and fishing activities
- aquaculture
- docks and piers

Protecting seagrasses

- reduce runoff & wastewater discharge
- avoid overboard discharge
- minimize dredging and filling
- use careful boating practices
- practice sustainable aquaculture
- build high narrow docks
- clean up coastal areas
- support Marine Protected Areas



is a global seagrass monitoring program, now active with many sites in the Tropical Atlantic region. SeagrassNet scientifically monitors seagrass beds so that changes in their health and structure can be determined with accuracy over time. All data collected are sent to a website for display and analysis: www.SeagrassNet.org.

Besides finding new information on the status and trends of seagrass health, SeagrassNet is committed to the long-term protection of seagrasses. In the Tropical Atlantic, SeagrassNet monitoring has shown that seagrasses near populated and rapidly developing areas do poorly, while seagrasses in more remote, pristine and protected areas, are still largely healthy.



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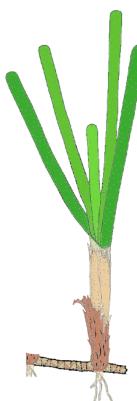
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Tropical Atlantic Seagrass

Seagrasses

- Underwater flowering plants
- Valuable coastal ecosystem
- Form vast seagrass meadows
- 10 species in Tropical Atlantic
- Nurseries, shelter and food for fish
- Manatees & sea turtles eat seagrass
- Recognize and protect them

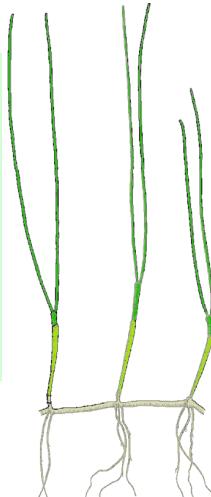
Tropical Atlantic Seagrass



Turtle Grass

- Flat leaves 10-60cm long
- Food for sea turtles

(*Thalassia testudinum*)

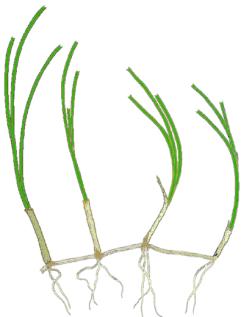


Manatee Grass

- Leaves round
- Leaves 10-60 cm

(*Syringodium filiforme*)

Shoal Grass



- Leaves flat and thin
- Leaves 2-22 cm long

(*Halodule wrightii*)

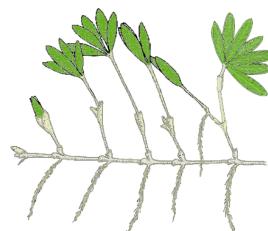
Paddle Grass



- Leaves 1-4 cm long
- Paddle-shaped leaves

(*Halophila decipiens*)

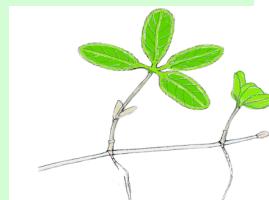
Star Grass



- 5-8 pointed leaves on a stem
- Leaves 2-5 cm long

(*Halophila engelmanni*)

Clover Grass



- 4-5 rounded leaves on a stem
- Leaves 2-3 cm long

(*Halophila baillonii*)

Seagrass functions and values

Seagrass contributes to a healthy coastal marine environment throughout the Tropical Atlantic region.

Seagrass provides productive habitat for commercially and recreationally important fish and shellfish species. It is a nursery for young marine creatures. Manatee and sea turtles eat seagrass; so do some fish and birds. Seagrass filters the water of sediments and pollution. The seagrass root mat adds stability to the coastal zone, and seagrass leaves lessen the impact of wave energy on the shoreline. As dead seagrass breaks down, it becomes part of the coastal food chain.



Turtles and manatee

Sea turtles and manatees eat seagrass. In vast seagrass meadows, divers and snorkelers can observe "feeding trails" of manatee, where these sea mammals have plowed along the bottom, eating seagrass as they go. A healthy seagrass resource is essential to manatees and turtles in the Tropical Atlantic.

Mangrove - seagrass - reef connection

Seagrasses, mangroves, and coral reefs form a three-part marine coastal ecosystem. Each part contributes to a healthy ocean. Mangroves filter the water coming off the land and create a stable shoreline.

Seagrasses further filter runoff and are nursery areas for many of the fish that live in coral reefs as adults.

Seagrass, as it dies and decomposes, provides a link in the food chain essential to coral reef animals. Coral reefs are productive areas of high biodiversity and beauty. Together, healthy seagrasses, mangroves, and coral reefs create a coastal resource for both fisheries and tourism essential to people.

