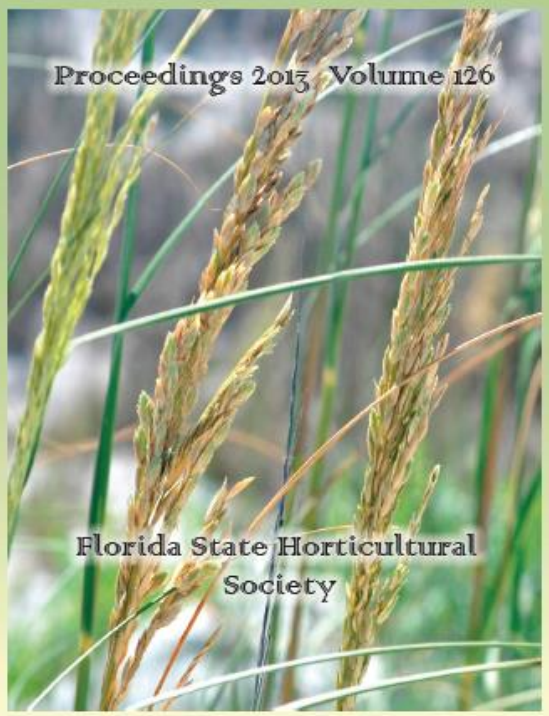

Front and Back Covers

Uniola paniculata (L.), or sea oats, is a semitropical perennial seen in dune and beach communities. The plants are long lived and slow growing, reaching almost 6 ft at maturity with tapering, narrow leaves that are less than 1 inch in width and up to 24 inches in length. The seed heads, or panicles, are large and made up of flat spikelets containing the seeds. The panicles are green when young and straw colored at maturity. Very few seeds are actually produced and the plants spread mainly by rhizomes and rootings from stem nodes. The base of *Uniola* stems has nodes that will root and help anchor the plant as wind-borne sediment accumulates around the plant. Semi-burial of the stem actually stimulates growth in *Uniola*, as in many dune plants. As is obvious with the habitat of *Uniola*, the plant is drought and salt tolerant, growing in generally sterile soil: it has been suggested that dune vegetation obtains micronutrients that are not available in its sandy habitat, from the salt spray. This grass produces a massive root system that makes it a valuable tool in coastal stabilization. Sea oats can be found on fore-dunes and barrier islands along the US Eastern Seaboard from Virginia to Florida, and areas on the inner Gulf Coast. *Uniola paniculata* is a protected species in the State of Florida due to its function in dune stabilization as well as its role as a wildlife habitat for a variety of invertebrates, small mammals, and nesting birds. Because of human disruption of its usual (prairie) habitats, the protected Florida burrowing owl is often found nesting in colonies of sea oats to conceal its young from natural predators.

Florida sea oat pictures courtesy of Sandra Matlack and Elena Branca.