

... Where to See
Kosteletzkya virginica

Seashore mallow grows in salt, brackish, and almost fresh marshes and along shores and edges of bogs and swamps on the outer coastal plain from New York (historically) and Delaware to Florida and Texas today. It also occurs in Bermuda and the West Indies. It blooms earlier in the summer southward, perhaps as early as May or June. In Virginia, seashore mallow is found in the Atlantic Coastal and Tidewater counties and up the Potomac as far as Prince William County. The main threat to this common native species is habitat destruction.



Map source - *Atlas of the Virginia Flora*, III (1992)

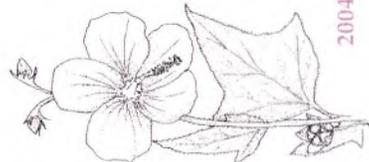
To see and learn more about Virginia native plants or to contact your local VNPS chapter about walks and programs, contact our office or visit our website at www.vnps.org.

Gardeners should not collect seashore mallow in the wild and should be certain that all native plants purchased for home gardens are nursery-propagated, not wild-collected. For a list of retail sources of nursery-propagated plants and responsibly collected seeds, see our website or send a SASE to:

Virginia Native Plant Society
Blandy Experimental Farm
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2
Boyce, VA 22620
540-837-1600; e-mail: vnpsofc@shentel.net
www.vnps.org

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Virginia Native Plant Society
Conserving Wild Flowers and Wild Places
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2004 Virginia Wildflower of the Year



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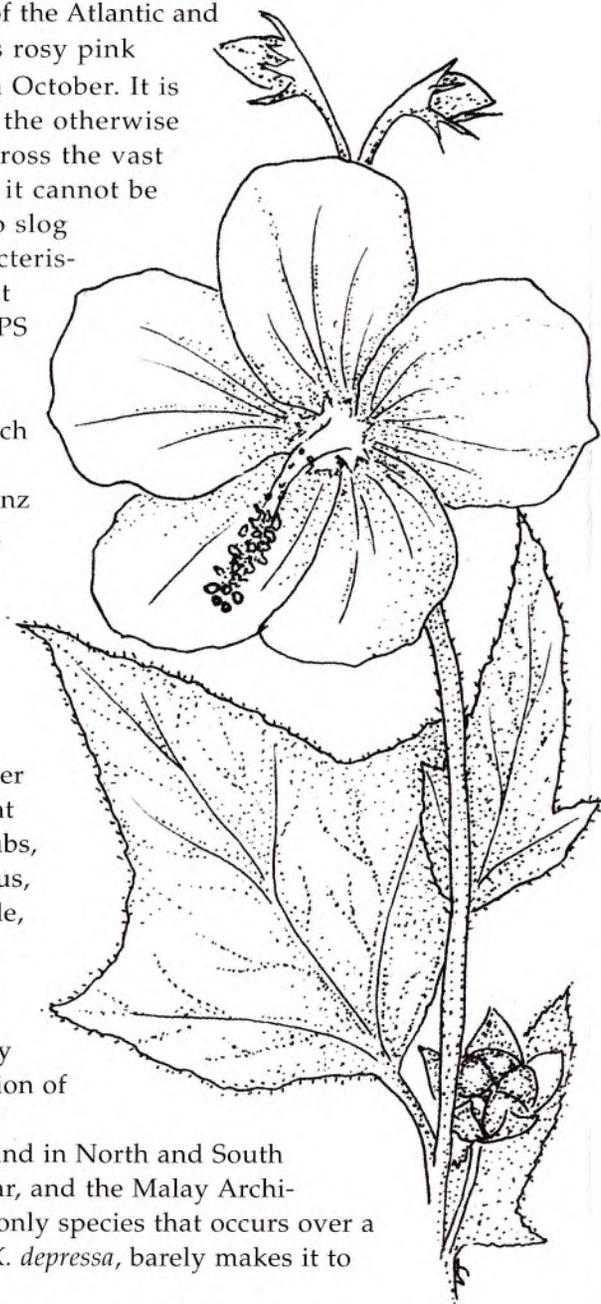
Seashore mallow lights up the salt and brackish marshes of the Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay shores of Virginia in summer with its rosy pink parade of 2-3-inch blooms from July to September or even October. It is one of the most common of the wildflowers that decorate the otherwise relentless summer green of grasses, rushes, and sedges across the vast expanses of marsh. Identifiable even from a speeding car, it cannot be missed in season and brightens the way of all who dare to slog through the muck of the marshes. So attractive and characteristic of the native coastal flora is the seashore mallow that it was selected by the South Hampton Roads chapter of VNPS as its floral logo.

Kosteletzkya virginica ("Virginian") was first described by Linnaeus in 1753 as a species of *Hibiscus*, but in 1835 the Czech physician-botanist Carl Presl transferred it to the new genus *Kosteletzkya*, named for the Bohemian medical botanist Vincenz Franz Kosteletzky (1801-1887). Other vernacular names used for the seashore mallow are seaside mallow, marsh mallow, pink mallow, salt-marsh mallow, and Virginia salt-marsh mallow. Marsh mallow, marsh-mallow, and marshmallow – it's all the same name, as with salt marsh, salt-marsh, and saltmarsh, usage depending on author, editor, or context.

The seashore mallow belongs to the cotton family, Malvaceae, a cosmopolitan family of about 80 genera and over 1,000 species concentrated in the American tropics and absent only from the world's coldest regions. It includes herbs, shrubs, and trees. *Hibiscus*, with about 300 species, is the largest genus, which includes ornamentals and the famous gumbo vegetable, okra – the young fruit of *H. esculentus*. The European marsh mallow, *Althaea officinalis*, has a mucilaginous root that was the original source of the paste used to make the namesake confection "marshmallow." Apart from food plants and many popular garden flowers, by far the most important contribution of the family is cotton (*Gossypium*).

Kosteletzkya is a genus of mallows of about 30 species found in North and South America, the Caribbean, southern Europe, Africa, Madagascar, and the Malay Archipelago. *Kosteletzkya virginica*, of the southeastern U.S., is the only species that occurs over a large area in North America. A second West Indian species, *K. depressa*, barely makes it to the southern tip of Florida in Monroe County.

Other uses than as an ornamental have not been reported, but the South Hampton Roads Chapter's wild food expert, Vickie Shufer, has this to say: "All mallows are considered edible – the flower petals can be steeped in water for tea and the green fruits while tender [eaten] as a nibble."



In the Wild

Seashore mallow is an herbaceous perennial that grows from a tough crown of roots and may get more than 3 feet tall. Its gray-green leaves are 3 to 6 inches long, half as wide, and typically more or less triangular with spreading basal lobes (hastate). The whole plant is somewhat roughened with tiny stellate (star-shaped) hairs. The stalked leaves are finely or sometimes coarsely toothed. The flowers may be borne singly in the leaf axils or in terminal, leafy panicles. The 5 pale to deep pink or occasionally white, spreading, separate petals are up to 1.5 inches long and wedge-shaped but rounded at the tip.

The numerous stamens form a column around the pistil and its 5 styles, which are capped by pinhead-like stigmas. The 5-celled pistil matures into a squatty 5-parted and 5-angled capsule that is less than a half-inch across and bears 1 seed per part.

In the Garden

Seashore mallow is relatively easy to grow under a variety of moisture conditions including good garden soil. It is available from nurseries.

"Height and dainty flowers make seaside mallow great for beds with grasses, sunflowers, boltonia, and goldenrods," says well-known garden lecturer, writer, and founding member of VNPS, Cole Burrell, who recommends it for Zones 6-9. He gives the following instructions on how to grow it: "Plant in rich, moist to wet soil in full sun. Plants are tolerant of windblown and soil borne salt. They thrive under ordinary garden conditions as long as the soil is not too dry. Plants emerge late, so take care not to dig into them. Propagate from seed, which ripens in late autumn."