

# Saltbush

(Atriplex canescens)



Where does it grow? Widely scattered in the high desert and southeastern part of Oregon. Although saltbush may occur in pure stands, it generally grows singly and scattered among other shrubs. It commonly is found with big sagebrush and rabbitbrush on deep, sandy soils and with greasewood and shadscale on salty alkaline bottoms.

Is it important? This species, commonly referred to as fourwing saltbush, is important in some western states but is not too important in most eastern Oregon counties. Saltbush produces an abundance of highly palatable and nutritious herbage. It is drought resistant and is grazed avidly by sheep at all seasons. It is one of the most palatable shrubs for cattle on winter ranges and is relished by big game animals. Saltbush is particularly valuable for winter grazing because it does not shed its leaves.

What does it look like? It is a grayish-white, scurfy shrub, widely branched from the base, reaching a height of 4 to 6 feet. Flowers are small and of two kinds, male and female, on separate plants. These are clustered at the ends of the branches and the seeds on female plants are conspicuously

surrounded with four wings or fruiting bracts. Leaves are narrow, up to 2 inches long, and like the young twigs, are covered with a whitish scurf or mealy coating.



Female flower (x3).



Fruiting bracts (x2).



Male flowers (x3).

Staminate flower  
(xl).

Description:

Length of life -- Perennial.

Height -- Usually about 4 feet.

Growth habit -- A widely branched shrub.

Growth period -- Early spring through midsummer.

How does it spread? -- Entirely by seed. A large supply of seed is set, but may be consumed by grazing animals.

Leaves -- Narrow,  $\frac{3}{8}$  of an inch wide to 2 inches long, alternate and somewhat clustered.

Twigs -- When young, brittle, whitish and hairy, like the leaves.

Seeds -- Characteristically surrounded by four fruiting bracts or wings.

Other names -- Greasewood, salt sage, and chamise.

Note: This is not the Chamise of southern California.

Does it look like anything else? It might possibly be confused with greasewood, rabbitbrush, or sagebrush at a glance, but close inspection would show the mealy coating of leaves and young twigs as well as the four wings on the seeds.