

Greasewood

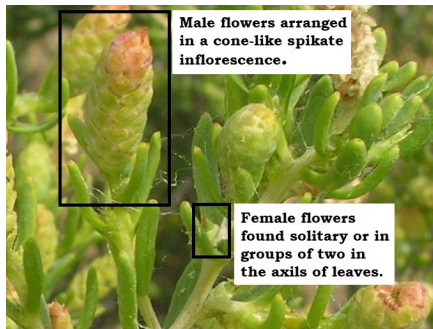
Scientific name: ***Sarcobatus vermiculatus* (Hooker) Torrey**

Common names: Greasewood, Black greasewood, Big greasewood, Seepwood

Meriwether Lewis, being the first to make a scientific collection of this plant, referred to Greasewood as ‘the fleshy leafed thorn’. Greasewood is a woody shrub with multiple branched stems that often taper into sharp thorns. Young stems have a yellowish appearance but become gray with age. Greasewood has simple, succulent, deciduous leaves. In our area Greasewood can grow up to 2 meters tall.

Although its flowers may look a little different than a picturesque wildflower, Greasewood is a native flowering plant. Not only do the flowers lack showy petals, they are also imperfect, meaning each flower has only male or female

reproductive parts. Male flowers are borne in cone-like clusters at the end of the stems. Female flowers (and fruit) appear lower in leaf axils on the same plant (monoecious). Greasewood is wind pollinated.



Greasewood grows throughout most of the Western U.S. in plant communities of saline substrates. In areas of high salinity, Greasewood may be dominant or associated with other saltbushes. Sagebrush and rabbitbrush are commonly associated plants in areas of lower salinity. The long branching taproots of Greasewood reach down to upper parts of the water table. Greasewood is a food source for large and small wildlife mammals and birds. It can also be an important browse for domestic livestock in the winter.

The genus name *Sarcobatus* refers to the succulent leaves and spiny branches; ‘sarkos’ means ‘flesh’, and ‘batos’ means ‘bramble or thicket’ in Greek. The Latin word ‘vermiculatus’ means ‘wormy, worm-shaped or worm-eaten’.

