



Spanish Moss

Tillandsia usneoides

Etymology

- ❖ Spanish Moss is not Spanish and it is not a moss.
- ❖ Family: Bromeliaceae. This family of bromeliads includes succulent house plants and pineapples.
- ❖ Genus: *Tillandsia* Carlo Linnaeus named the genus to honor his Swedish teacher, Elias Erici Tillandz (1640-1693), botanist, professor of medicine and president of the Finnish Royal Academy of Turku.
- ❖ Species: *usneoides*. The specific name of the plant, *usneoides*, means "resembling *Usnea*", which is a genus of lichens - and Spanish Moss is not a lichen. [6]



© Salicyna, Moss is green after rain,

History of Common Name

- ❖ Native Americans called it Itla-okla, which meant “tree hair.” It was the early French explorers that called it Barbe Espagnol, or “Spanish Beard”, more or less as an insult to the Spanish conquistadors long beards.
- ❖ The Spanish, in return called it Cabello Francés, or “French Hair.” Over time the French name won out, and as time went by Spanish Beard was adopted as Spanish moss.



Location and Type of Plant

- ❖ Native to Mexico, Central America, South America, the U.S., and the Caribbean. In the U.S., it grows from Texas to Virginia. , it mainly stays in the moist habitat preferring a healthy tree in a wetland site.
- ❖ It is an epiphyte. Epiphytes are organisms that grows on the surface of a plant but take moisture and nutrients from the air and rain water. It is not a parasite, like Mistletoe. It is not a saprophyte, a plant that lives on dead or decaying matter, like Resurrection fern.



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SCALES ON LEAVES

Flowers



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- ❖ Flowers: White, Yellow, Green
- ❖ Blooms: April, May, June
- ❖ Perennial
- ❖ Leaves: White, Gray
- ❖ Water Use: Medium
- ❖ Light: Part Shade, Shade
- ❖ The plant thrives on rain and fog, some sunlight, and airborne or waterborne dust and debris.

Plant and Leaf Structure

- ❖ It has no roots.
- ❖ It is made up of slender stems with thin, curved leaves (called *festoons*) which grow in a chain-like fashion and form a hanging mass up to 20 feet long.
- ❖ The surface of each leaf is covered with tiny gray scales that trap water when it rains. This is why the moss looks bigger and greener after a good rain. The water is stored in these scales until the plant can absorb it, which keeps the plant alive through dry periods.
- ❖ The plant will die if there is no rain, even if it is a humid area.



Reproduction

- ❖ The most common way Spanish moss is propagated and spread is by fragmented pieces of the festoons. If a festoon is broken off and carried off by wind or birds who use it as nest material, it can grow into a full plant.
- ❖ The seeds of the moss have feathery appendages like dandelion seeds. This allows them to float through the air until they land on a good spot to grow: another tree.
- ❖ Pollinated by insects.



Wildlife

- ❖ Many kinds of wildlife use of Spanish moss. Birds use it for nesting material. Frogs and spiders live in it.
- ❖ Those who gather Spanish moss are warned against ticks, fleas and chiggers, but experienced collectors know chiggers only invade the moss after it touches the ground.
- ❖ The major pest of cotton, the boll weevil, is especially drawn to Spanish moss, but moths are not.



Wildlife, More



- ❖ Many of those lofty festoons provide habitat for wildlife. Yellow-throated warblers and northern parulas nest among the tendrils, and two Texas bat species (northern yellow and Seminole) roost within clumps.
- ❖ One jumping spider (*Pelegrina tillandsia*) occurs only in Spanish moss.
- ❖ Snakes may also hide in it.

Uses



- ❖ American colonists mixed Spanish moss with mud to make mortar for their houses—some of which are still standing strong.
- ❖ Dried moss makes good tinder for fires. You can make it into blankets, rope, and mattress filling. Mattresses filled with Spanish moss are noted for staying cool on a warm summer night.
- ❖ In modern gardens it can be used as a mulch. Not only does it cover the soil, but it also can soak up and retain water.

Credits and Thanks

- ❖ <https://texasforestcountryliving.com/spanish-moss/>
- ❖ <https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/lockhart/ranger-notes/2019-ranger-notes/forest-imposter>
- ❖ <https://tpwmagazine.com/archive/2011/feb/scout1/>
- ❖ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_moss
- ❖ <https://www.monaconatureencyclopedia.com/tillandsia-usneoides/?lang=en>
- ❖ <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/tillandsia-usneoides/>



<https://www.wildflower.org/gallery/>