

*Atriplex* L. SALT BUSH

*Atriplex semibaccata* R. Brown, CREEPING SALT BUSH, BERRY SALT BUSH, AUSTRALIAN SALT BUSH. Perennial herb to subshrub (not woody), many-stemmed at base from woody caudex (often buried), branched throughout, prostrate to decumbent, 5–80 cm tall, width >> height; monoecious; shoots gray-green, white-scurfy, the hairs initially colorless and balloonlike (vesicular) collapsing when desiccated to form white, scurfy coat (farinose). **Stems:** cylindric, young stems < 1 mm diameter, tough, tannish, scurfy becoming glabrate by peeling in strips. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, short-petiolate to subsessile, without stipules; petiole < 2 mm long; blade ovate or lanceolate to elliptic or oblanceolate, 3–30(–40) × 2–10(–12) mm, tapered at base, dentate or remotely dentate to entire on margins (commonly with 1 margin entire and the other margin dentate), broadly acute to obtuse or rounded at tip, pinnately veined but only midrib apparent when fresh, scurfy to having ± vesicular hairs. **Inflorescences:** unisexual clusters of sessile flowers (glomes), in terminal and subterminal subspheric spikes of < 10-flowered glomes ca. 2 mm across (staminate) and axillary and 1–several-flowered (pistillate), bracteate, scurfy; bract subtending staminate glome leaflike; bracteoles subtending and completely enclosing pistillate flower 2, sessile or with stalk < 0.5 mm long, fused below midpoint, rhombic, 3.2–4 × 2.9–3.5 mm increasing in fruit, mostly with 2 teeth on each edge just above fused portion, acute at tip, initially scurfy. **Staminate flower:** radial, ± 1.5 mm across; **perianth** calyxlike, 5-lobed; tube to midpoint; lobes broadly ovate-triangular and cupped, ± 0.5 mm long, herbaceous and green along midrib, membranous and translucent on margins and tip, becoming reddish rose, scurfy on lower surface; **stamens** 5, opposite perianth lobes, fused at base; filaments ± 0.6 mm long, colorless to pale green; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, ca. 0.25 mm long, yellow to greenish yellow, the sacs broadly ellipsoidal and joined near tip by a short connective, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **pistil** absent. **Pistillate flower:** bilateral, compressed within bracteoles; **perianth** absent; **stamens** absent; **pistil** 1, ca. 2 mm long; ovary superior, vertical lenticular, 1.2–1.4 mm wide, slightly wider than tall, 1-chambered with 1 ovule; style 2-branched or sometimes 2 and split completely to base, the fused portion < 0.2 mm long, the branches equal or unequal, 0.6–1.2 mm long, stigmatic most of length. **Fruit:** utricle, 1-seeded with seed adherent to fruit wall, enclosed in paired bracteoles; utricle membranous, slightly winged along edge above midpoint, the wing colorless becoming rose; bracteoles elongating at base and becoming fleshy except for the free margins and tip, 3–6 × 3–4.5 mm, venation strongly netlike on inner surface and externally when dry strongly veined and netlike, the basal fleshy portion enclosing fruit obovoid, reddish, the nonfleshy portions appressed, grayish green, flat, acute to obtuse at tip, typically toothed as base of free margins. **Seed:** slightly smaller than fruit, dimorphic, ± lenticular, 1.5–1.7 mm wide (black) or 2 mm wide (dark brown), glossy, with tip of radicle ascending and lateral. Late March–mid-November.

Naturalized. Perennial of waste areas, especially saline habitat near the coast but also occurring inland, e.g., Wildwood Regional Park (SH). *Atriplex semibaccata* is a small-leaved, monoecious species that is the only saltbush having fleshy red “fruits.” These red structures actually are the fleshy, fused bracteoles enclosing the lenticular seed, which may

be either black or dark brown. When young, the diamond-shaped bractlets are flat and conspicuously veined. In range, its closest relative is *A. suberecta*, and both have C<sub>4</sub> photosynthesis and anomalous secondary thickening of stems and roots so that neither is truly woody.

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