

# RECIPE FOR GROWING FLORIDA ROSEMARY

## Main Ingredient: PATIENCE!

by Ann F. Johnson



Fifteen, twenty-five, and forty-year old rosemary shrubs growing in the white



sand scrub and each showing the characteristically rounded form of the



open grown plant

The Florida rosemary, *Ceratiola ericoides*, is a dark yellow-green, needle-leaved shrub which grows naturally in the white sand scrubs of interior and coastal Florida. Its rounded growth form, evergreen habit, and color, which contrasts with the brighter green of the neighboring oaks and palmettos, make it attractive as a possible candidate for landscape planting in the white sand regions of the state.

In the course of studies on rosemary, I recently germinated and grew several hundred seedlings in the greenhouse at Bucknell University. For the interest of all who might wish to try growing rosemary for themselves, I include the following procedure which worked for me.

1. Collect the fruits (small yellow berries), which are ripe from December through March. A rough rule of thumb is about one handful of berries per 6" pot. Spread the berries out to dry at room temperature for seven to ten days. Do not store the fresh berries in tightly closed containers because they will mold. Well-ventilated paper bags are best for long-term storage. If kept dry, the seeds are viable for at least a year, and probably longer, after collection.

2. Separate the berries from the leaves and twigs mixed with them by placing a pinch on a sheet of paper and turning the paper so the berries roll off into a dish. Repeat this procedure until the berries are all

"clean". This is done because the leaves may possibly inhibit germination.

3. If you want to speed up germination (from one year to 6 months), sand the dried fruits between two pieces of medium sandpaper. Place a pinch of dried fruits on one sheet of sandpaper and sand them with the other until they no longer roll around. Slide the result into a shallow saucer and gently blow off the chaff, leaving the small, tan seeds. Skip this step if you're willing to wait eight months to a year for germination.

4. Sprinkle about two pinches (about 2000) of the dried fruits (or sanded seeds) on the surface of a sand-filled pot at least 6" wide and 6" deep, and which has holes in the bottom for free drainage. Damp paper toweling can be used to block the holes in the bottom. Fill the pot with sand no closer than one inch from the top edge so the seeds will not bounce out when they are watered. It is very important to use pure sand with no silt or clay admixed. Plants in silty or clayey sand are stunted and won't grow properly. Sand from swimming pool filters, or the white "sugar" sands in Florida are suitable. Large pots are needed because the seedlings will not grow well if they are transplanted within the first year after germination.

5. Water the pots daily for 6 to 12 months. If a crust forms on the surface, break it up so the water

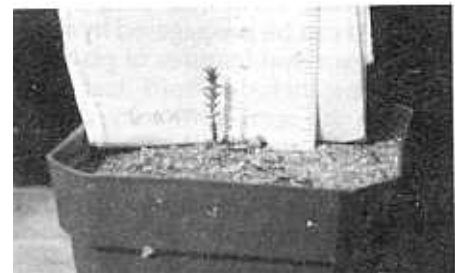
drains freely. It does not matter if the seeds wash around on the surface.

6. The first sign of germination is a thin red stem which emerges from the seed and curves down into the soil; two narrow leaves (which don't look much like rosemary leaves) emerge later. After germination, water carefully with a sprinkler so as not to wash away the seedlings. Carefully break up any sand crust between the seedlings so the water can penetrate.

7. Water daily or every other day for another 12 months. If you wish, add a very dilute solution of liquid fertilizer once a month (I used 1/10th Hoagland's solution). Be careful not to over-fertilize. Keep the seedlings in full sun.

8. After a year or more the seedlings can be transplanted to sandy, well-drained soil in full sun. Water daily for at least three weeks after transplanting.

Have patience, and good luck!



A six-month old rosemary seedling, germinated and grown in the greenhouse at Bucknell University.