

Padre Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Padre Island National Seashore



Seabeans



Imagine a sun-ripened seed falling from the vine to the ground. It sits there for weeks until the rain washes it into a nearby river. Destination unknown, this seed moves with the river's flowing waters until it spills into the ocean. Weeks and months pass, and the little seed drifts along at the mercy of the wind and ocean currents until it stumbles upon the sandy beaches of an island or distant continent. Due to the converging currents in the Gulf of Mexico, many seabeans make their way to the shores of Padre Island National Seashore. The next time you stroll along the beach, keep a watchful eye. You never know what treasures may have washed in with the last tide and sit waiting to be found.

Origins

Seabeans originate from trees and vines mostly found on tropical shores and forests all over the world. In these areas, sunlight is unable to reach the forest floor, allowing the seeds to germinate. Some plants have adapted to their environment by producing seeds that will float to where sunlight has a better chance of reaching them. These travelers fall from the parent plant into waterways, such as the Amazon River, and are carried into the ocean. A majority of the seabeans found on Padre Island originate in the Caribbean and Central or South America. Others may come from places not so far away, such as Florida. Black walnuts, which come from North America, can be found in temperate areas and are brought here by rivers that spill into the Gulf of Mexico, such as the Mississippi River.

People and Seabeans

Around the world, peoples of every ethnicity and culture have developed symbolic meanings for the foreign seeds that wash ashore. The Mary's bean was considered a good luck token because of the cross on its surface. In parts of Scotland, women believed that if they held the bean during labor they would have a safe delivery. Nickernuts have been worn as amulets to ward off the "Evil Eye" from sea-goers. A popular legend in the Azores says the sea heart inspired Columbus' voyage to new land.

Some seabeans have been used for medicinal and hygienic purposes, including snakebite antidotes, skin balms, shampoos, and soaps. They have also been used for making musical instruments and jewelry. Sea hearts have also been carved into snuff boxes and vesta boxes, which are used to hold matches. Today, seabeans continue to delight and fascinate the young and old as they comb the recent tideline for these hidden treasures.



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A. Starnut palm **B.** Pecan **C.** Brain bean **D.** Sea heart **E.** Hamburger beans **F.** Sea purses
G. Antidote vine seed **H.** Mary's bean **I.** Tropical almond **J.** Golf ball pod or Sea-coconut **K.** Gray nickernut