



GARDEN BY THE SEA

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Careful planning and site preparation will ensure your coastal garden is just as stunning as your ocean views

Many of us dream of living near the coast and having a garden by the sea. Establishing a garden within a coastal environment has a number of challenges, but with some careful planning and site preparation you can create a garden that's as spectacular as your sea views.

Our wild New Zealand landscape has many unique coastal environments from windswept, exposed cliff tops to sheltered harbour estuaries and dramatic beachside locations. Depending on your proximity to the sea and how your garden is to be used will greatly affect the overall design.

Most coastal gardens must cope with strong, salt-laden winds, harsh sunlight, drought and less-than-ideal soil conditions.

First, choosing the right plants for the right situation is paramount. Coastal designs are greatly enhanced by working with the

surroundings so they harmonise effortlessly with the natural coastal environment.

This can be achieved by using a palette of hardy native plants adapted to this harsh environment and some carefully selected exotic species that also thrive by the sea. Native plants obtained from local sources (ie eco-sourced) are better adapted to the local climate. Bold drifts of natives planted in contrasting textures looks stunning on a windswept hillside or groupings of uniquely shaped succulents such as agaves and aloes look great in seaside garden beds. Many plants that are frost-tender can be grown in a coastal garden because the sea has a moderating effect on the climate.

Creating windbreaks to filter the wind is vital if you want a sheltered outdoor area for dining and relaxation. Solid walls or hedges only create more turbulence. Plant a protective barrier of salt-tolerant natives to the front and continue to layer with other, taller species. Open-slat timber screens or temporary woven mesh can be erected, which can also help buffer the wind, especially while younger plants are establishing. Be careful not to block out valuable light or obstruct coastal views.

Choosing outdoor furniture for coastal conditions also needs to be carefully considered. Salt-laden winds will corrode metal fixings and framing. Stainless steel or galvanized steel with a paint finish is the best





TOP 10 NATIVE AND EXOTIC PLANTS BEST SUITED TO COASTAL GARDENS

Natives

- *Phormium spp.* (flax): Versatile, hardy and looks fantastic in large swathes of contrasting colours. It also attracts birds into the garden.
- *Coprosma acerosa* (sand coprosma): A groundcover found naturally near the coast throughout New Zealand. A hardy native perfect for dry conditions.
- *Pittosporum crassifolium* (karo): A small tree suitable for hedges and screening/shelter. Has grey-green foliage and dark red flowers.
- *Brachyglottis spp.*: Silver/grey foliage native smothered with yellow flowers all summer.
- *Muehlenbeckia astonii*: A divaricating shrub with a wiry habit. It's very hardy, tolerating dry, windy locations.

Exotics

- *Agave attenuata*: Large, pale-green rosettes on thick trunks. Looks stunning when planted in groups.
- *Aloe thraskii* (dune aloe): A single-stemmed aloe with yellow follows in winter. Makes a real statement when planted in the garden intermingled with other native plants that divaricate (plants with tangles stems and very small leaves).
- *Strelitzia reginae* (bird of paradise): This plant has exquisite tropical-looking orange/blue flowers and loves a sunny, well-drained site.
- *Echium spp.*: A dramatic-looking plant with towering, purple flowering stems that will attract the birds, bees and butterflies into the garden.
- *Leucospermums* (pincushion): A gorgeous flowering South African plant that thrives in sandy, light soils in hot, windy conditions.

option. Let timber furniture silver off naturally if you don't wish to keep up with staining or oiling requirements.

The nature of the site and surrounding landscape are important sources of inspiration for a coastal garden. Design a new garden around existing vegetation and landforms. A relaxed, informal style is best, using natural, durable materials such as timber, rock, shells, stones, rusted steel and driftwood. Hard landscaping needs to blend with the environment rather than conflict with it. Built structures such as decks and pergolas need to be purpose-built to withstand the test of time — even with the constant onslaught of sun, salt and rain, so use hardwood timber and stainless-steel fasteners.

The sea and surrounding coastlines are endlessly changing, so it makes sense to capture every aspect of it. Create intimate natural-looking seating areas in and around

the garden, close to the house, perched on a hillside or a short stroll from the water's edge.

Creating a garden on or near the coast can also have a huge impact on natural ecosystems, so it's best to tread lightly on the land and work with it rather than against it. Soil is also often light and sandy or heavy clay depending on your location. Soil preparation

is the foundation for any successful garden and even more critical for gardens that have to survive such harsh conditions. Erosion is also commonplace around coastal cliffs, banks and sand dunes. Some natives can help to reduce erosion and improve soil stability as well as invite native birds and animal species into the garden. ■

1. A clinker-built dinghy perches high above the sea, providing a focal point and extra 'table' space.

2. A substantial steel and hardwood pergola built to withstand harsh coastal conditions.

3. Stepping-stones provide estuary access past mature pohutukawa, connecting the garden to the surrounding coast.

4. Naturally weathered timber sits comfortably in this coastal context, with sea views creating a sense of solitude.

