

Coastal Wildlife Gardening

How to garden successfully in coastal environments



Gardening for wildlife often seems more suited to lush, sheltered inland areas, rather than the seemingly inhospitable coastal environment. There is, however, huge scope for creating beautiful and varied coastal gardens that are also welcoming to local species.

When planning a coastal garden, as with any garden, it is sensible to work with the natural conditions that prevail.

There are two crucial aspects to remember. The first is that the air is salty, and many plants cannot survive it. Salt can cause leaf burn and defoliation and build up in the soil.

The second - and perhaps the most important - is that it is windy by the sea which can make the difference between success and failure. Wind can cause physical damage to limbs and stunt growth.

The following pages should help you to garden successfully in these conditions.



portland spurge
- N. Wyatt

Nature has two ways of protecting plants from wind - they have either small, leathery, wind-resisting leaves, or they grow in sheltered spaces. Choose well and plant in the right place and your garden will thrive. Plants that are suited to biting salt-laden winds and free-draining soil or gravel will do best.

Ideally it is best to choose native flora, although other species can also be beneficial to wildlife. Use a mix of hardy plants plus species that can stay sheltered behind existing trees or walls.



common birds' foot trefoil
- P. Precey

Practical tips

- Choose lots of plants that are naturally adapted to the conditions (as a guide these are plants with small, leathery, wind-resisting leaves).
- Put young plants in to allow them to grow to the conditions.
- Tree guards are a good idea to help protect newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Where conditions prohibit direct planting, plants can be put into sturdy containers or raised beds where they can form mini-habitats for attracting wildlife.
- If you are purchasing rocks and pebbles for your garden, make sure they are from an environmentally sound source. Removal of pebbles and sand from the beach can contribute to coastal erosion.
- In coastal areas, although there is a lot of rain, the poor soil quality and higher levels of salt can cause increased moisture loss. Mulch the beds to try to reduce this loss and save water. If you do have to water, evening is the best time, when evaporation will be less.
- Fertilising plants will be vital to the survival of plants in coastal areas. Make your own compost or collect seaweed and dig it straight into the soil. Be sure to wash off any surface salt from the seaweed before use.
- Plant in clumps with repeated patterns.

An inspirational garden ...

The garden at St Mary's Island, Whitley Bay is an inspirational garden that has explored techniques of "gardening at sea".

This vibrant garden has transformed the bare and rocky site at the foot of the lighthouse into a wonderful coastal garden. Willow hurdles have been secured to create shelter from the unrelenting winds for the carefully chosen plants.

Designing your coastal garden

Depending on how close you are to the sea and how the garden is to be used may effect your designs.

Coastal gardens can be greatly enhanced by working with the surroundings to create a space in character with its environment. You can use beach debris, including driftwood, fishing nets and old rope to enhance your design and if you can get hold of some old lobster pots, they make great plant pots.



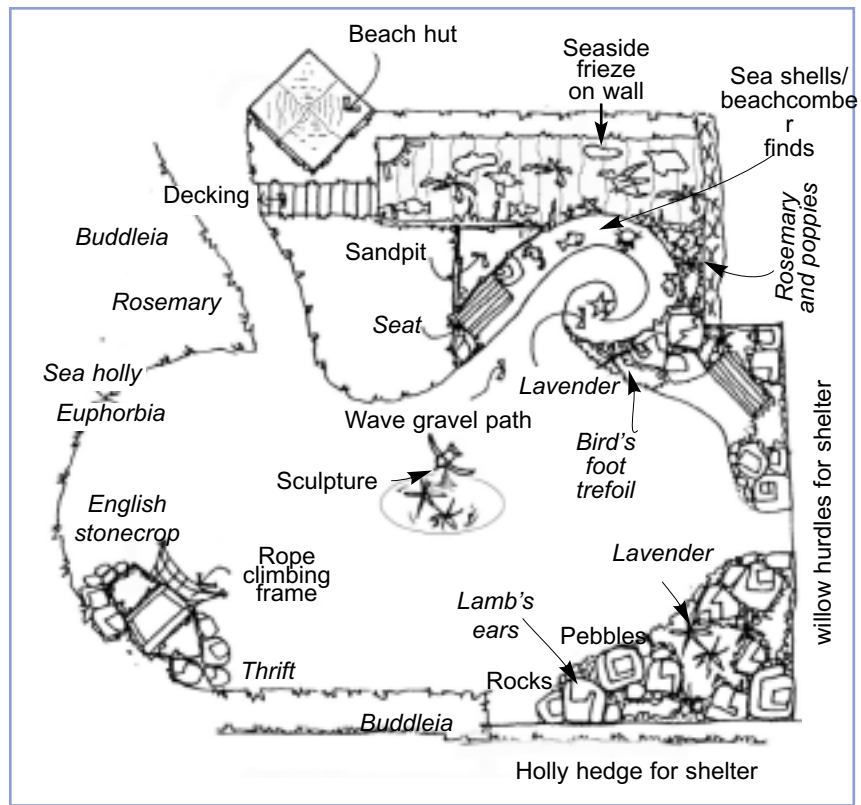
sea holly - N. Wyatt

A Living Landscape

Our gardens represent a vast living landscape; and with an estimated 16 million gardens in the UK, the way they are managed can make a big difference to wildlife.

Across gardens and beyond, The Wildlife Trusts' vision to create A Living Landscape involves enlarging, improving and joining-up areas of wildlife-rich land in all parts of the UK. There are now over 100 inspirational Living Landscape schemes around the UK, rich in opportunities for sustainability, learning, better health and wellbeing. What is good for wildlife is good for people too.

For more information go to www.wildlifetrusts.org



Horned Poppy - a yellow flowering plant which attracts bees and hoverflies for its pollen.

Sea Holly - attracts bees, butterflies and beetles for its nectar. It is becoming increasingly rare on sand dunes and shingle. Flowers June to September.

English Stonecrop - likes acid soils, forming a mat of blue-green fleshy leaves.

Euphorbia - many species of these evergreen perennials can tolerate the coastal environment.

Bird's Foot Trefoil - common on dry grassland, thrives on sand and shingle along the coast.

Thrift - evergreen perennial with pink flowers which is common on sandy cliffs.

Shrubs and perennials such as sage, rosemary, lavender, holly and buddleia will also withstand harsh conditions. These may be interspersed with grasses such as blue fescue and onion grass.



common thyme - P. Precey

With global warming, water shortages and a more frequent summer occurrence, the coastal garden can teach all gardeners lessons about conserving water and working with nature.

So do not despair with your coastal garden - take advantage of the many aesthetically pleasing and wildlife-friendly plants that will thrive in harsh conditions and make your garden into a seaside haven.

Seed mixes of coastal wildflowers are readily available from suppliers including the HDRA organic gardening catalogue (tel: 01247 6303517 email: enquiry@hdra.org.uk www.hdra.org.uk).

Your contact details here

AVAILABLE IN OTHER FORMATS