

coastal gardens

With our great climate, people are now embracing the idea of their garden becoming an extension of their home. In today's hectic world, time is a precious resource. In the midst of chaotic urban life, we all need a tranquil escape, a secluded outdoor sanctuary we can retreat to.

For the many people who live near the coast, when asked what 'feel' they would like from their garden they usually answer that they would like to bring the beach home. Luckily, an inspiring outdoor space is easy to achieve with planning and a good selection of plants.

Coastal gardens are often more difficult due to the plants being exposed to the elements. Plants need to be chosen carefully or they can die from salt pollution and getting battered by strong winds. Salt is carried in the wind and

1 & 2. *Designed to forge a seamless connection with its seaside surrounds, this water-wise coastal garden on Sydney's northern beaches was designed by Ken Lamb of Imperial Gardens Landscape. The garden fuses a simple Japanese design aesthetic with hardy coastal native plantings.*

builds up in the soil and on plant foliage. This can cause leaf burn and eventually can cause stunting to the plants.

To slow down the coastal winds, a barrier is essential. The windbreak can be in the form of either a fence or plants. A fence has



COASTING ALONG

Having a coastal garden brings both challenges and rewards

Story: Amanda Elboz, MAILDM
Photos: Diane Norris

the advantage of being instant; however, the disadvantage with a solid fence is that the wind is forced up and over, creating more turbulence rather than reducing the speed. The ideal is a permeable fence such as a timber-slatted construction that the wind can move through while being forced to slow down, thereby creating a better microclimate for your garden and allowing a broader selection of species.

The long term solution is to plant a good variety of hardy, salt-tolerant shrubs and trees as the frontline barrier. Plants that have adapted well to coastal conditions usually have small leaves or a hard leaf surface for self-protection. Suitable plants include New Zealand Christmas trees, tea trees, banksias and varieties of figs and olives for those who

would like some tasty fruit in the garden.

The plants must be suitable for sandy and generally alkaline soils. By adding organic materials to sandy soil you will help to improve its structure, which will help with water and nutrient retention. Compost and slow-release fertilisers are the best ways to supply nutrients to the plants.

Careful consideration must be given to plant selection when planning the garden. When designing the garden use low-growing shrubs and groundcover that won't be affected by wind. Groundcovers will also help stabilise the soil and prevent soil erosion from strong winds. Suitable groundcovers with wonderful silver foliage include silver bush (*Convolvulus cneorum*) and snow in summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*), and

who can pass up kangaroo paws (*Anigozanthos*) for stunning flowers and New Zealand flax (*Phormium*) for coloured foliage.

To bring the beach home you need to create the same feeling you have at the beach. The site must integrate into the larger landscape and strengthen its coastal connection without overpowering the view. The area must feel generous and open yet a sense of privacy needs to be created. Screen plantings and timber screens can be used to achieve this by hiding boundary fences and neighbouring houses.

An area of shade is vital in the coastal garden. Shade structures over entertaining areas mean you can increase the amount of time spent outdoors. To escape the heat

of the day you only have to retreat under an umbrella, arbour or covered pergola.

Outdoor showers are becoming standard features in designs for houses located near the beach. They can be used to wash off the sand after the beach or to just to cool off in summer.

The choice of materials will also reinforce the design intent. The use of stone for retaining walls or paving ensures a strong statement and a look that will not date. The stone blends in with the natural environment and gives the area character and warmth. Timber decks are ideal for entertaining and barbecue areas. The timber also brings warmth to a space and a natural feeling. The bonus is that timber also maintains a nice temperature year round underfoot. ■