



Amanda Elboz, landscape designer, in her garden in North Curl Curl.

Why plant choice is vital

Amanda Davey

FOR northern beaches residents, alfresco entertaining and outdoor living has become a compulsory pastime, and who can blame us?

After all, we are the fortunate few who are able to enjoy a temperate coastal environment that is mostly conducive to enjoying the outdoors all-year-round.

As a result, our homes are typically characterised by open spaces, plenty of natural light and seamless indoor/outdoor living areas that focus on the garden setting and, for the really lucky ones, the water views.

But even with our preoccupation with beautifying our natural surrounds it seems many of us are still choosing the wrong plants for our coastal landscapes.

According to North Curl Curl landscape designer Amanda Elboz, who heads up Space Landscape Designs, coastal gardens tend to be more difficult to maintain due to their exposure to the elements.

Therefore plants need to be

chosen carefully with special consideration given to those that can withstand salt-laced winds and dry, sandy soil.

"Commonly people will go to a nursery and choose plants based on how much sun and water they require according to the label, rather than focusing on the whole environment in which they'll live," she said.

"Many plants can't tolerate salt which can build up in the soil and on the foliage causing leaf burn and stunting."

While finding plants that are suitable for sandy and alkaline soils is imperative, careful consideration must be given to groundcover to help stabilise the soil and prevent soil erosion from strong winds.

Ms Elboz recommends silver bush (*Convolvulus cneorum*) with its distinctive silver foliage, snow (*Cerastium tomentosum*), kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos*) and New Zealand flax (*Phormium*) as ideal ground cover for coastal properties.

However, to create a garden with a real beach feel, she said it was crucial that the site

integrates into the larger landscape.

"This way you can 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 while creating a micro-environment due to the windbreak and ultimately enabling a greater selection of plants."

Suitable plants for screening include New Zealand Christmas bush, tea tree, banksia and varieties of figs and olives.

Nonetheless, even these hardy specimens need a little help to grow and prosper.

Adding organic materials to sandy soil will help to improve its structure which will aid water and nutrient retention.

Ms Elboz recommends compost and slow-release fertilisers as the best way to supply nutrients to coastal plants.

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