

# BESIDE THE *Seaside*

*Living near the sea doesn't mean you need to compromise on your outside space. By choosing hardy salt-tolerant plants, providing shelter and adding some quirky nautical pieces, you can have fun with coastal gardening*

Coastal gardening allows you to unleash your creativity using found objects, such as these pieces of driftwood, and don't forget the power of paint to create sculptural detailing, as here in this private garden that edges the beach.



*'Dense planting with no lawn and no exposed soil creates an illusion of a garden much bigger than it actually is'*

**G**ardening by the sea requires careful planning as you need to deal with a range of challenges, including salt spray and wind. Climatic conditions vary around the coast, from mild down south to exposed and cold further north. Think beyond the usual lawn with beds and embrace the unique visual elements of the coast – from pebbles to flotsam and jetsam found along the beach. Create shelter with boundaries that filter the wind and salt; then find seaside-proof plants to create clumps and drifts.

An example of taking on the challenge with exuberance is Driftwood, a small garden in East Sussex. Owner Geoff Stonebanks has created a vibrant jumble with creative detailing, packed full of ideas to inspire, by fully embracing the possibilities the location offers. When he moved from his small town garden in Barnet to Driftwood in 2004 Geoff had an initial dream to create a cottage garden, bringing with him more than 100 pots from his London home. 'The salt-laden winds prevented that; many of my plants were lost in the first winter and I have learnt from experience,' he explains. 'I had to work with the prevailing weather conditions and create gravel beds and use plants that defy the wind and rain. The garden has developed organically, a bit at a time as an idea came to me – there's been no grand plan.'

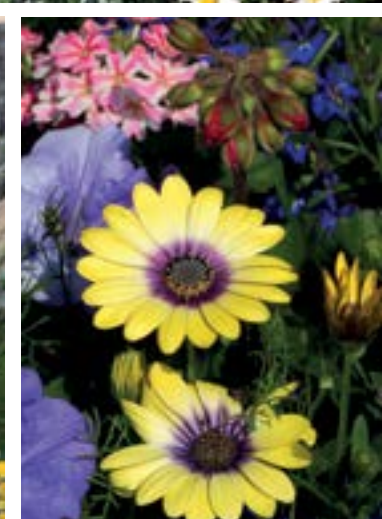
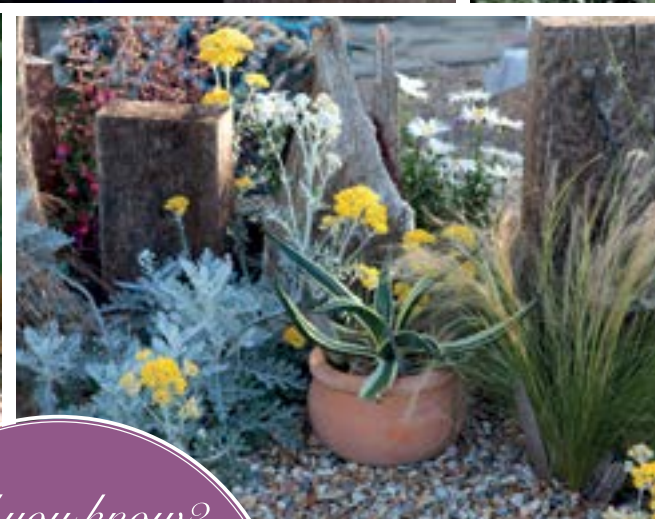
Starting in 2007 with a summerhouse, Geoff worked his way around the sloping plot, removing the lawns, creating level areas for furniture and developing different garden rooms. 'I made wind breaks with *Griselinia littoralis* and low hedges with

*Olearia traversii* 'Tweedledum', using wicker panels to both ease the wind and help divide the garden into rooms,' he adds.

The exposed front garden is beach themed, partly inspired by the Derek Jarman landscape, with an old timber rowing boat, lobster pots, fish crates, sculptural driftwood and rusted metal features, and is planted with wafting grasses, bright perennials and agaves, all set in gravel. Sunny faces of *Gaillardia* 'Dazzler' and *Coreopsis* 'Calypso' mingle with clouds of *Verbena bonariensis* and magenta penstemons. Timber seats are placed to look out over the garden to the sea and allow time for Geoff and partner Mark Glassman to enjoy the location. A new feature for this year is a jetty with water beneath.

#### A LAYERED TAPESTRY

In contrast, the back garden is a layered tapestry of colourful planting and quirky installations, and is home to more than 400 varieties of plants and shrubs that draw the eye as you wander the winding paths. 'Heavy, dense planting with no lawn and no exposed soil creates an illusion of a garden much bigger than it actually is,' explains Geoff. Here he has successfully created a feeling of a cottage garden with its eclectic palette; from pots billowing with petunias and fuchsias to green metal patio furniture that appears to float on a sea of daisies. Creative one-off pieces abound, >>



#### Did you know?

The terms flotsam and jetsam, used to describe odds and ends found washed up on beaches, refer to specific types of marine waste – flotsam (to float) for debris, often due to shipwrecks, found floating on the water; jetsam (jettison) are items deliberately thrown overboard by a crew of a ship in distress to lighten the load.



#### Clockwise from top left

An old dingy and lobster pots are offset with *Senecio cineraria* 'Silver Dust', coreopsis, gaillardia and Erigeron 'Pink Jewel' in the garden at Driftwood; reclaimed timber makes great sculptural pieces; sunny splashes from *Osteospermum* 'Blue Eyed Beauty'; if you provide shelter you can create a floral oasis to sit among, with cottage favourites such as fuchsias, daisies and lobelia; *Leucanthemum x superbum* 'Snow Lady' surround a patio setting; place seashells around your plants for an authentic beach look; agave is a great choice for coastal planting, as is *Stipa tenuissima*.

FEATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY: LEIGH CLAPP

#### Coastal gardens to visit

- **Trebah Garden, Cornwall** Sub-tropical paradise with a coastal backdrop
- **Overbeck's, Devon** Dramatic planting
- **Walmer Castle, Deal** Overlooks the sea
- **Arundell, Cornwall** Opening as part of the National Gardens Scheme (NGS) on Sunday 17 July (1-5pm)
- **33 Peerley Road, Sussex** Opening as part of the NGS on Sunday 3 July (12-4pm)
- **Yewbarrow House, Cumbria** Opening as part of the NGS on Sunday 3 July, Sunday 7 August and Sunday 4 September (11am to 4pm)
- **Suil Na Mara, Norfolk** Opening as part of the NGS on 27-28 August (11am to 5.30pm)
- **Harbourside, Sussex** Opening as part of the NGS for groups.

Find out more about the garden openings at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk).



Decorative metal fish swing among massed *Erysimum Bowles Mauve* in the Driftwood garden; hardy lavender and *Sempervivum* houseleeks (left), grow in an old piece of pipe.

*‘Put plants together that you might at first think are unconventional – it’s amazing what looks great if you just think outside the box’*

whether it’s vintage teacups filled with succulents or towers of stones encased in oxidised metal. ‘It’s a very personal garden with plants and objects once owned by family and friends,’ adds Geoff.

It is clear this is a garden made of great care and passion that continues to evolve. ‘When I first decided to create my garden, with absolutely no experience in garden design, I just did what felt right for me, and I have achieved it by trial and error. Never be afraid to try something, even if it fails. Be bold and put combinations of plants together that you might at first think is unconventional – it is amazing what looks great together if you just think outside the box,’ says Geoff. ‘I am always changing parts of the garden from one year to the next as I get many repeat visitors and love them to see something fresh each year. People are the final ingredient to make a garden come alive.’

### *Tips for coastal gardens*

- Provide windbreaks with hedges that filter and slow down the wind.
- Use living willow fences and chestnut picket fences with narrow gaps to allow wind through.
- Geoff uses hardy perennials that work in the coastal conditions then adds summer annuals across both gardens.
- Cut out some ‘portholes’ in hedges to give views.
- Look for plants with the botanical names of *Maritima* or *Littoralis*, meaning ‘of the shore’.
- Coastal plants often have tough, hairy leaves to protect against moisture loss and salt damage.
- Plant in late spring and summer to give plants time to establish before winter gales.
- Mulch and protect young plants with shingle, flint, grit or gravel – this provides sharp drainage while conserving moisture at the roots.
- Use bright colours in the stronger light.

Driftwood, Bishopstone, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2RS **OPENING TIMES** 9, 10 and 23 July. Also open as part of the National Gardens Scheme on 19 and 28 July (11am to 5pm); admission £4 (children free). • Open by appointment for groups of four to 20 until 2 September; admission £6.50 (children free). Great teas and light lunches served on vintage china at each opening. For other opening times see website: [www.geoffstonebanks.co.uk](http://www.geoffstonebanks.co.uk)