

COASTING ALONG

The right plant in the right place – take inspiration from some of our finest coastal gardens to plan and maintain your own flourishing seaside plot, says **Alex Fisher**

A carpet of pink thrift covers the hillside, a backdrop of sea beyond. The white flowers of sea campion nod their heads in the breeze and, closer to the ocean, sea aster, our native Michaelmas daisy, has found a home in rocky crevices. Late June and early July are the best times to see our coastal wildflowers, the cabbage-like sea kale decorating shingle shores with clouds of white blooms, while the blushing flowers of sea bindweed snake across sand dunes, contrasting beautifully with blue-green sea holly.

If you are looking for inspiration for your own coastal garden, a walk among our native plants is a good place to start. This is how the late Derek Jarman began when he planted his now famous garden on Dungeness shingle beach in Kent. The fact that this location is officially classified as a desert (the only one in the UK) didn't deter him. Whenever

coast-dwelling friends lament the loss of new plants to the salty winds I refer them to his carefully chosen plants.

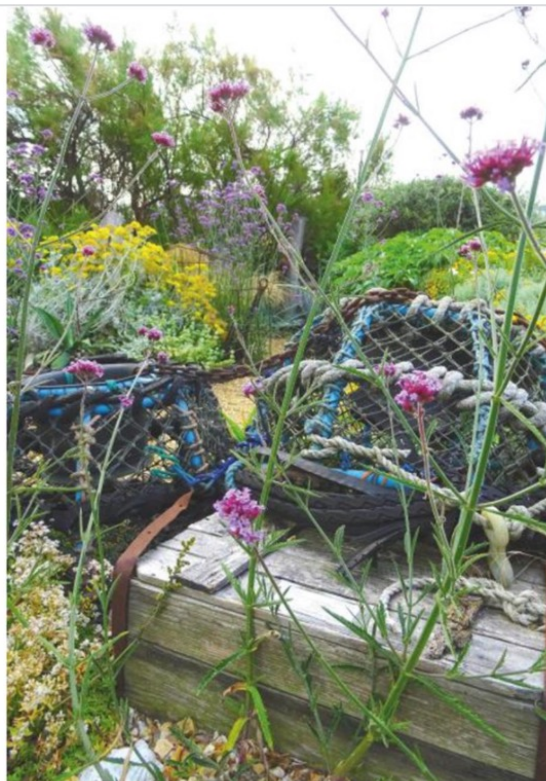
Of course, some areas of the British

LITTLE OASIS

Derek Jarman's
Dungeness
cottage



NATIVE PLANTS, SUCH AS LAVENDERS, ROSEMARY, SAGE AND MARJORAM, ARE NATURALLY ADAPTED TO MINIMISE WATER LOSS



SEASIDE SPECIAL

Geoff Stonebanks, *top left*, suggests planting agaves in pots and using nautical objects as obstacles to wind

DESERT BLOOMS

Derek Jarman began by observing what was already thriving nearby and found that sea kale, valerian and restharrow (*Ononis repens*) were happily living around his tiny fisherman's cottage. Shrubs such as gorse, blackthorn and broom were abundant locally and so were incorporated into his scheme, providing some structure – albeit growing to a shorter height than they would further away from the sea.

He added Mediterranean plants to the native ones, such as lavenders, rosemary, sage and marjoram, as they are naturally adapted to minimise water loss. In addition, delicate flowers such as yellow horned poppies, the delicate marshmallow, marigolds, foxgloves and cornflowers filled the small patch with vibrant colour.

CREATING SHELTER

As well as enriching what is often poor soil with plenty of organic matter and covering this with mulch, coastal gardeners need windbreaks to offer more shelter to delicate plants. Geoff Stonebanks, creator of the award-winning Driftwood Garden in Seaford, East Sussex, says, 'The number-one tip I can offer to those new to coastal

coast are easier to garden than others, with many of the most exotic examples found on the south coast of Cornwall, where the climate is milder. Trebah near Falmouth and Tresco in the Isles of Scilly are two stunning examples. However, that doesn't mean you can't have success further north – the sub-tropical forest in Portmeirion, North Wales, has an extraordinary display of magnolias, camellias and rhododendrons, afforded protection from the wind by carefully planted trees, and there are many beautiful gardens made possible by the Gulf Stream on the west coast of Scotland, although conditions are more challenging on the east.



For those who would like to try some of these plants at home, Mini Moderns offers a carefully curated Dungeness Seed Collection (minimoderns.com)

GARDENING

MARINE DREAM

Acanthus provides colour, while tamarix serves as a windbreak, right. Coastal-themed decorations add a whimsical, visual element, below



tip

If you plan to put up a fence, go for slatted or mesh, which will help reduce and deflect winds, but won't catch the full force. Your fence will last longer

✦ gardening is to grow hedges for shelter. I have an *Elaeagnus* that is 8ft tall and 4ft wide, full of birds, which protects the garden from the harsh south-west winds.'

But we can't necessarily wait for a windbreak to grow before getting started, so Geoff, who has had more than 21,000 visitors to his private garden via the National Garden Scheme (NGS), suggests using coastal-themed structures as obstacles to wind. 'I've used groins, railway sleepers and even a boat. They serve a purpose, but also add another visual element.'

DESPITE ITS CHALLENGES, COASTAL GARDENING HAS MANY POSITIVES – WARMER TEMPERATURES AND LESS CHANCE OF FROST

PLANTING IN POTS

One of the tricks used by keen coastal gardeners is growing in containers that can be moved to a more protected spot in winter. Geoff admits to having more than 300 agaves in pots, which are rehoused in an alleyway in the autumn. 'This gives me more flexibility with my design,' he says. 'Most people don't notice the pots once they are in position. They're just hidden among other foliage.'

Despite its challenges, coastal gardening has many positives – with more sunshine, warmer temperatures and less chance of frost. The NGS, which is in full swing by June, offers the opportunity to peek inside private coastal gardens, so book somewhere near you for inspiration – you may be surprised at what is possible. See ngs.org.uk for opening updates.



tip

If you can, position 'wintering' pots by the warmest wall of the house

GEOFF STONEBANKS' TOP FIVE PLANTS FOR A COASTAL GARDEN

1 *Coronilla glauca*

This gorgeous Mediterranean shrub is a little like gorse and has winter-long yellow flowers lasting well into spring. It does very well by the sea in an exposed situation.



2 *Bupleurum fruticosum*

Otherwise known as shrubby hare's ear, this robust, evergreen shrub is wind resistant and still very pretty, with yellow flowers in summer.



3 Sea kale

This perennial grows wild on many of our beaches. It forms clumps of around 70cm high, with blue-green cabbage-like leaves, and scented white flowers in early summer.



4 *Acanthus mollis*

Commonly known as bear's breeches, this dramatic perennial grows tall, dagger-like spikes up to more than a metre high. Mine has mauve flowers that appear in the summer, and they are also available in white.



5 *Tamarix* (tamarisk)

This deciduous shrub grows up to 4m tall and has been the perfect foil for my garden, creating a windbreak that protects other plants. It also produces pale pink, feathery flowers.



Driftwood Garden (driftwoodbysea.co.uk) will be open by arrangement for Macmillan Cancer Support from 21 June-12 August (entry £8.50, including a talk by the owner); and Macmillan Garden Trail 24-25 July. For National Garden Scheme details, visit ngs.org.uk. Book a timed entry slot online before travelling.