



# SEASIDE PLANTING

447 Winthrop Road, Deep River, Ct. 06417  
(860) 526-9056 [www.acergardens.com](http://www.acergardens.com)  
email – [acer@acergardens.com](mailto:acer@acergardens.com)

Gardening near the water brings a unique set of challenges: sandy soil, drought, salt spray, wind and storms, wind-blown sand and winter flooding all impact your gardening efforts. There are, however, some natural advantages. Because the water is slow to warm up in the spring and takes its time cooling down in the fall, the gardener gets an extended spring growing season (relying on successive bulb plantings) and a long, leisurely fall. Conditions near the water mean that no hardiness zone rating is completely reliable or accurate and you may need to depend on what others have grown successfully in your area for ideas and planning. In most cases, traditional New England shade trees do not do well at the seaside; they snap in storms and are out of character with the general look but there are many smaller trees that stand up to the weather and, in time, provide a focal point or shade. Smaller trees and shrubs acclimate fast and usually don't require staking. (In a big storm, a stake can become an air-borne weapon and may cause a break where it is tied to the tree.) Mixing deciduous shrubs, dwarf conifers and broad-leaved evergreens can give you a carefree look that still provides privacy.

Deciding on the focus of your garden will help you establish the “look”. Do you want to add to the view or lead the eye to it? Do you want to create little garden pockets around the house and not interfere with the general sweep of the landscape or do you want to create a blending of house, garden and general landscape? If your property goes down to the water, build windbreaks with smaller native shrubs or dwarf evergreens and use them as a background to set off indigenous plants. You can also add raised beds to set off parts of the landscape. In fact, native plants and grasses have all adapted to the changeable seashore landscape and thrive.

Many people prefer a “cool” palette for the seaside and use pale colors so as not to compete with the water view. Others depend on the bright colors of annuals ... most are pest and disease resistant and drought tolerant. They thrive in the hot summer sun and, dying at the end of the season, they need no winter protection and are simply discarded. And, some people bring the beach home by planting a garden featuring typical coastal plantings such as lamb's ear, juniper, sedum, artemisia, thyme, salvia, ice plant, cosmos, blanket flower and ornamental grasses. Plant them haphazardly, to create the look of the seaside, add beach ornaments and use pea gravel as mulch.

Sandy soil is generally thin and, because it drains quickly, should be tested and augmented. Improve the moisture-retentiveness of soil by adding humus, compost, peat, moss and/or top soil or it will not retain enough moisture to keep your plantings going. Prevailing winds can dry out plantings but mulching beds and plantings to a depth of 2” will help. You will still need to water often especially as you get into hot weather and drought. Rock crevices can be utilized to showcase plants that thrive in thin soil.

Salt spray carried by the wind does not generally cause severe problems and may even help to control insects on roses, hollies, lilacs and zinnias. Plants tolerant of sea spray include hydrangeas, hibiscus, Rose-of-Sharon, rugosas, crab apple, laurel, lavender, Oriental and Asiatic lilies, daylilies, yucca and pyracantha.

Many plants, especially natives, have developed their own defenses: silver-gray foliage and small-leaved plants tend to shed water. After a heavy storm, it is a good idea to hose down your plantings to remove the salt.

Listings of proven and dependable seaside plants include:

**Perennials**

Achillea	Yarrow
Aconitum	Monkshood
Allium	Ornamental Onions
Armeria	Sea Thrift
Artemisia	Wormwood
Coreopsis	Tickseed
Delosperma	Ice Plant
Dianthus	Pinks
Digitalis	Foxglove
Echinops	Globe Thistle
Gaillardia	Blanket Flower
Guara	Wand Flower
Gypsophila	Baby's Breath
Hemerocallis	Daylily
Heuchera	Coral Bells
Iris siberica	Siberian Iris
Lavandula	Lavender
Lillium	Oriental/Asiatic Lilies
Malva moschata	Rose Mallow
Perovskia	Russian Sage
Phlox paniculata	Summer Phlox
Rudbeckia	Coneflower
Sedum	Stonecrop
Stachys	Lamb's Ears
Veronica	Speedwell
Yucca	Adam's Needle

**Annuals**

Antirrhinum	Snapdragon
Artemisia	Dusty Miller
Cleome	Spider Flower
Cosmos	
Dahlia	
Geraniums	
Ipomoea	Morning glory
Nicotiana	Tobacco Flower
Nigella	Love-in-a-Mist
Petunias	
Portulaca	
Salvia	Sage
Verbena	
Zinnia	

**Grasses**

Festuca	Fescue Grass
Panicum	Switch Grass
Pennisetum	Fountain Grass

**Ground Covers**

Ajuga	Bugleweed
Arctostaphylos	Bearberry
Hedera helix	English Ivy

Juniperus  
Parthenocissus tricuspidata  
Vinca Minor

Juniper  
Boston Ivy  
Periwinkle

### Vines

Campsis radicans  
Clematis paniculata  
Hydrangea petiolaris  
Lonicera  
Polygonum aubertii  
Wisteria

Trumpet Vine  
Sweet Autumn Clematis  
Climbing Hydrangea  
Honeysuckle  
Silverlace

### Shrubs

Aronia  
Buddleia  
Caryopteris  
Clethra alnifolia  
Cytisus  
Forsythia  
Hibiscus  
Hydrangea  
Ilex glabra  
Ilex verticillata  
Kolkwitzia  
Ligustrum  
Myrica  
Potentilla  
Prunus  
Pyracantha  
Rosa rugosa  
Spiraea  
Syringa  
Taxus  
Viburnum  
Weigela

Chokeberry  
Butterfly Bush  
Bluebeard  
Summersweet  
Scotch Broom  
  
Rose-of-Sharon  
  
Inkberry  
Winterberry  
Beautybush  
Privet  
Bayberry  
Bush Cinquefoil  
All Beach Plums/Cherries  
Firethorn  
Beach Rose  
Bridal Wreath (many varieties)  
Lilac  
Yew

### Trees

Acer  
Aesculus  
Fraxinus  
Gleditsia  
Magnolia  
Malus  
Nyssa sylvatica  
Picea  
Pinus  
Salix  
Tilia cordata

Maple (Paperbark, Norway, Red)  
Buckeye  
Ash  
Honey Locust  
  
Crab Apple  
Pepperidge Tree  
Spruce (Black, Blue, Alberta)  
Pines (Mugo, Stone, White, Scotch, Black)  
Willow  
Little Leaf Linden