



Gardening with Shannon

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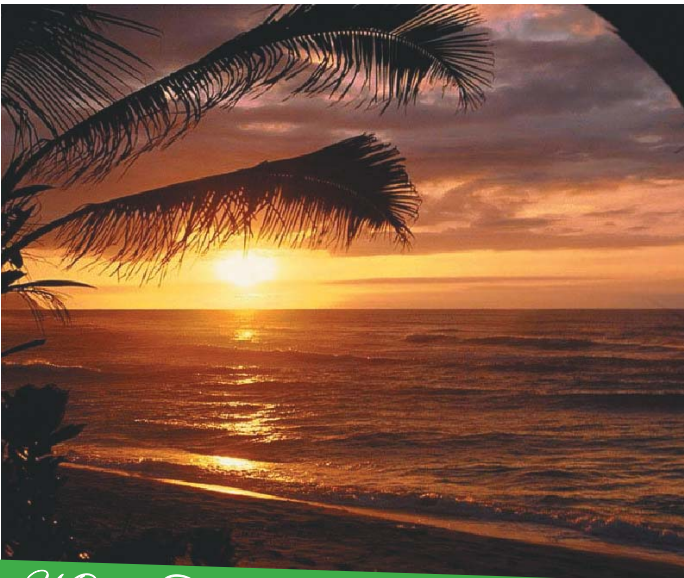
DECEMBER GARDENING ISSUE

Yes, it is that time of year again. It's that busy month where we are rushing around doing the last minute Christmas shopping, completing projects for work and preparing for the summer getaway at the beach. However, once the initial hectic organising is done, there's nothing like the excitement of Christmas and all the fun that goes with it. From Christmas parades, carols, putting up the Christmas tree, to decorating it, along with the squeals of children's delight and the gathering of friends makes this time of year very special.

For us, Christmas in New Zealand is less about snow and sleigh bells and more about sun, sand and barbecues in the backyard. It is a true family get-together with summer holidays sending us off to the beach bach, visiting friends, sharing laughter and barbeque platters.

So maybe you have a seaside garden that you don't know what to do with?

Gardening near the coast presents a special challenge, often having poor, sandy soils or else clay that bakes hard in summer. The main enemy of a seaside garden is the salt laden winds. Salt carried on the wind not only dries out the soil causing plants to lose moisture but also tears at their foliage and scorches leaves, which may result in stunted growth. However the secret of a beautiful beach side garden is to simply garden with the conditions and not to fight them.



Step 1: Resist the urge to rip out whatever is currently growing in your coastal garden. The planting may not be to your liking but the existing plants will provide shelter for new garden plants and their roots will help to bind the soil and hold it until new plants can replace them.



Step 2: Soil preparation is always critical to the success of a new garden. Try to dig in plenty of organic matter, and if you are able, collect seaweed to make compost or use as mulch. Continue to feed the garden each year by spreading a layer of mulch about 100mm deep and digging in organic material whenever planting or working the ground. Gradually you will see the soil structure improve.

Step 3: Plant for the coast! There is a long list of plants that love the coast, and perhaps pre-eminent among them is our Pohutukawa tree. These lovely trees show a truly spectacular sight of red blossoms that can be seen along the coastlines of New Zealand. Here are a few coastal plants for your new coastal garden:



- **Griselinia littoralis:** the broadleaf is an ideal coastal plant, the shiny leaves protect it from excessive moisture loss and make it a very attractive hedge or background tree.
- **Phormium tenax:** the native flax has a strong architectural form with its upright grey-green leaves and deep brown-red flower spikes. Provides a good windbreak and looks good year round.
- **Cordylines:** A cluster of cordylines will make a striking outline against the sky and coastline; plant either side of your view to create a 'frame'. Cordylines are extremely tough, wind and salt tolerant but may need rabbit protection when young.

The list of coastal plants goes on: *Correa reflexa*, *Coprosma repens*, *Echium candicans*, *Choisya ternata*, hibiscus, *Myoporum laetum*, *Nerium oleander*, *Olearia chathamica*, *Corokia cotoneaster*, *Pittosporum crassifolium*, *Arbutus unedo*, eucalyptus, *Dodonea viscosa* and olives (*Olea europea*).

Palms give an instant feel of the tropics. There are many to choose from, such as our native nikau palm, *Rhopalostylis sapida*. Using large-leaved plants and trees such as the puka (*Mertya sinclairii*) as well as climbers, such as *Tecomathe speciosa* deliver a tropical look. Flowers on the kaka beak (*Clanthus puniceus*), Australian frangipani and hibiscus will reinforce the tropical theme, as do the bright canna flowers and bromeliad foliage.

Just remember - make sure you stake your new plants firmly. Do not select tall or whippy specimens, choose a smaller, lower grade which will catch less wind until they are established and their roots more firmly into the soil.

Gardening near the coast may be a special challenge, but from adversity comes inspiration. There are many different plants that will thrive at your coastal getaway, so make the most of them and create your relaxing abode.

Happy Gardening, Shannon ■

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the team at Paradise Landscapes