

The HPS Horticultural Advisory Service

Focused primarily on hardy plants, the Society offers a personal Gardeners' Question Time service. Here are some more questions and answers.

From P:

I have a small 'hut'/cottage in South Cornwall, on a cliff about 200m high overlooking the sea, which I use as a holiday home. At the moment the garden is just grassed over with the odd daffodil popping up in spring, but nothing has been planted there so I am starting from scratch, and have no knowledge of plants suitable for a coastal location.

I would, if at all possible, like to make it into a pretty oasis of continual flowering and colour throughout the seasons, mixed in with a selection of evergreens so it doesn't look barren in winter. There is a low picket fence around the plot, providing some protection.

I'm happy to spend a reasonable amount buying new plants, but obviously I don't want to waste the money. Please can you suggest any plants that are particularly suitable for a seaside garden (albeit high up, so no direct sea spray).

To P:

How lovely this spot sounds! The fence will certainly help to get plants established. Let's start with some woody things to give some structure for the winter.

Although you say your garden is too high to get direct sea spray, the atmosphere will still be affected by the salt. But these evergreen shrubs should cope, as they have waxy leaves: *Choisya*, *Elaeagnus*, *Escallonia*, *Griselinia*, *Hebe*, *Olearia* and gorse. To them you could add deciduous *Hippophae* (Sea Buckthorn) which carries orange berries all winter, various varieties of *Rosa rugosa* with red hips, and *Tamarix*.

For year-round colour from perennials, and to make maintenance simpler, it would be best to grow fairly short plants which won't be knocked about by gales. For the spring, simple wild primroses do remarkably well in these conditions and would be happy joining the daffodils growing in grass. For summer borders you could try any of these: *Anthemis punctata*

subsp. *cupaniana*, *Erigeron glaucus* 'Elstead Pink', *Osteospermum jucundum*, *Geranium sanguineum* (any varieties), *Centranthus ruber*, *Euphorbia myrsinites*, *Euphorbia epithymoides* (syn. *polychroma*), *Rhodiola rosea*, *Sedum* (low-growing varieties), *Anaphalis*, *Armeria maritima*, *Silene uniflora*, *Limonium*, *Glaucium*, *Senecio cineraria*. You will see that several have 'maritima' as part of their name, indicating that they are happy in coastal situations – so look out for any plants named thus! *Iris foetidissima*, which grows wild in south Cornwall, has evergreen strappy leaves and pods of bright red berries which would bring some winter interest.

Finally, one of the best ways to see what will grow in your particular area is to go and look at local gardens, particularly any that open to the public. The owners are usually happy to tell you the names of anything that you like the look of.

I hope this will give you some ideas of what to invest in for your seaside garden.



Armeria maritima



Centranthus ruber albus



Rhodiola rosea



'Eggesford Sky'



'Lyn Valley'



'Taw Valley'



'Northern Star'

From N:

I would like to start a small bed of agapanthus going in my garden, but living in west Cumbria (between Cockermouth and Aspatria), I wondered what variety I should be looking at, whether the plants should be spaced apart or in a 'clump', and how should I look after them over the winter to protect from frost.

The plants will be in the ground, in a rectangular space roughly 70 x 45cm. The back of the rectangle, as you look at it, is part of a barn wall. This part of the garden gets the afternoon sun from about one o'clock. The soil is approximately 50cm deep and then we hit old cobbles.

I would be grateful for any advice on a good, hardy, woody agapanthus (perhaps 'Storm Cloud'?) and on its winter care.

To N:

Our expert advises that there should be no problem in growing the more hardy deciduous agapanthus in your part of the UK. These plants have been bred over the years from hybrids from the hardier species, particularly *A. campanulatus*, which comes from higher altitudes in South Africa. This type of agapanthus tends to have narrower leaves,

and smaller flowers – but lots of them. Avoid the big, lush, broad-leaved types as they are probably evergreen and therefore not hardy. If you know that the part of the garden where you want to put them is prone to frosts, cover the plants with a dry mulch over the winter.

Our expert has been selecting hardy and free-flowering varieties over the years, and can particularly recommend:

'Eggesford Sky' – large heads of sky-blue flowers

'Lyn Valley' – tall strong stems and dark blue flowers

'Taw Valley' – hardy, not too tall

'Northern Star' – dark blue flowers and free flowering

These will give a range of colours and in the space available you might get 3 plants, either all the same or different cultivars.

A few extra points: the best flowering comes from mature plants, so be patient! The soil needs to be rich and fertile but free draining; the cobbles below will help here. Make sure your agapanthus doesn't dry out in the period leading up to flowering, that is May to July, and during this time they may benefit from fortnightly feeds of tomato fertiliser.

I hope this gives you enough information to get started on this project. 🌸

You may find the answer to your gardening questions from members of your Local Group, or in the Society's on-line horticultural library, or use the HPS Advisory Service. The Service is free, and the Society's experts will try to answer your gardening questions, especially those concerning the use and growing of hardy perennials. They will try to respond to you quickly, but please bear in mind that specialist questions may take some time to research.

Email your question to: advisory@hardy-plant.org.uk