

Breakwater terrace near Santa Barbara

A sandy path was the inspiration behind the terrace garden pictured at right. "The path was here when we bought the place, and I loved it," says Susan Sullivan, who owns the property in Carpinteria, California, with her husband, Connell Cowan. "To me it's the beckoning road to unknown possibilities. I insisted we keep it."

Sullivan and Cowan, unlike the Mannings, wanted a simple garden that would work well with the architecture of their home and that would not require much maintenance. They also wanted landscaping that would complement their surroundings. "We wanted our garden to relate to the marsh and wetlands sanctuary near us," says Sullivan. Along the path, landscape architect Susan Van Atta created a garden that has the feeling of a dune grass wilderness. The simple plant palette includes beach strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*), common thrift (*Armeria maritima*), and native grass *Leymus condensatus* 'Canyon Prince'. The grass is especially appropriate, because this particular cultivar was discovered on Price Island, an islet located off San Miguel Island, which Sullivan and Cowan can see from their property.

At the end of the path, a simple concrete terrace is snugged up against the breakwater. Unlike the larger terrace next to the home, this one is intimate, just right for a tête-à-tête against the backdrop of gently rolling surf. At night the scent of wood smoke and the flicker of flames in a firepit make conversation easy and long. The warmth feels good, too, as temperatures drop.

Coastal fog is laden with salt, and soil by the beach is often nearly pure sand. But a surprising number of plants have adapted to exactly these conditions, Van Atta says. Having done a lot of beach revegetation, she particularly admires tough native species like beach strawberry. "Blowing sand can completely smother it, and the plant will just grow right up through it," she says. "Use plants like this, and you'll have almost no maintenance." Though irrigation was used to get plants established, they could survive without it now, she adds.

Other plants aren't all quite as tough as coastal natives, but several, including shrubs such as Natal plum (*Carissa macrocarpa*) and euonymus, can tolerate seaside challenges. Many ornamental grasses also thrive here, as do succulents such as sedums and aloes. A few annuals reseed readily here too, such as Livingstone daisy (*Dorotheanthus bellidiformis*) and Jupiter's beard (*Centranthus ruber*). For more suggestions, see "Top Plants for Coastal Locations," at right.

DESIGN Van Atta Associates, Santa Barbara (805/730-7444)

Top plants for coastal locations

Whether you live on a Southern California beach, atop a bluff overlooking Puget Sound, or somewhere in between, if your property is within sight of salt water, chances are your garden gets buffeted by wind. The following plants thrive in such conditions. Most are native to the Mediterranean and do best in fast-draining soil.

English lavender

(*Lavandula angustifolia*). The hardiest, most widely planted species; fragrant blooms. Many varieties.

Pride of Madeira


(*Echium candicans*). Shrub. Large candle-like clusters of bluish purple flowers above gray-green leaves in spring.

Rockrose (*Cistus*)

Shrub. Showy flowers of white or lavender pink (depending on species) appear spring into summer on mounding plant.

Sea lavender (*Limonium perezii*). Perennial. Clusters of rich purple, crepe-papery blooms above rosettes of wide green leaves.





A winding path, "dune" plantings, and a simple beach patio play off views across the water to distant San Miguel Island

Tiny pink blooms of thrift (*Armeria maritima*) edge the path. The ornamental grass *Leymus condensatus* 'Canyon Prince' is native to Prince Island.