

Coastal Landscaping in Massachusetts

Sample Landscape Plan for a Coastal Bank with an Existing Seawall

This PDF document provides graphics and additional information to supplement the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) [Coastal Landscaping website](#). It includes a landscape plan for a coastal bank with an existing seawall, a landscape profile showing the yard as viewed from the house looking toward the seawall, and a plant list providing a complete list of species used within the plan (as indicated by the appropriate plant icon). Unless otherwise noted, all listed plants are *native*, which for purposes of this factsheet means occurring naturally in eastern Massachusetts. For more detailed descriptions of each plant, see [Plant Highlights and Images](#) for PDF fact sheets of Grasses/Perennials, Shrubs/Groundcovers, and Trees.

Historically, engineered structures such as seawalls and revetments were built to protect coastal banks from erosion and storm damage. However, these structures can cause serious problems along an eroding shoreline, including arresting the flow of sand from the bank to beaches, deflecting waves, increasing erosion in adjacent areas, and undercutting the stability of the structure itself. In addition, these structures can alter groundwater flow and surface water runoff and destabilize the bank and adjacent areas. Because of this, the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act prohibits construction of most new engineered structures on coastal banks that serve as a sediment source. For existing seawalls, revetments, and other engineered structures, plants can be used around the structures to help uptake water, control runoff, and buffer storm waves to help prevent further erosion and to protect vulnerable areas.

Landscape Plan for Coastal Bank with an Existing Seawall



Graphic by Betsy Rickards

Landscape Profile for Coastal Bank with an Existing Seawall



Here, a variety of native grasses, perennials, groundcovers, and shrubs will help beautify the area, provide wildlife habitat, and filter pollutants before they reach the ocean. The deep-rooting fibrous grass, switchgrass, was recommended to help control channelized runoff that could cause erosion. Pennsylvania sedge is used throughout the site as a substitute for lawn grass, as a durable erosion-resistant pathway to the stairway, and for low-maintenance accents in other areas of the garden. Native shrubs and perennials are used to screen the seawall, absorb stormwater runoff, and provide berries and shelter for wildlife.

Also see:

- [Sample Landscape Plan for a Coastal Bank](#)
- [Sample Landscape Plan for a Coastal Dune](#)

Plant List for Landscape Plan for Coastal Bank with an Existing Seawall

| Plant icon | Botanical name | Common name | Height | Value |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------|--|
| Perennials and grasses | | | | |
|  | <i>Carex pensylvanica</i> | Pennsylvania Sedge | 6-12" | Low, clump-forming, grass-like perennial with pale-green arching leaves. The grass spreads quickly, grows well in sun or shade, and binds the soil with its dense roots. |
|  | <i>Eurybia spectabilis</i> | Eastern Showy Aster | 1-2' | A purple-flowered, short-stemmed aster that is easily cultivated and makes a showy display in late summer. This perennial herb spreads and forms clones by rhizomes. |
|  | <i>Panicum virgatum</i> | Switchgrass | 3-6' | Valuable perennial grass with deep-rooted, rhizomatous roots, and a tolerance for both drought and moist soils. This grass is an ideal soil stabilizer. |
| Shrubs and groundcovers | | | | |
|  | <i>Ceanothus americanus</i> | New Jersey Tea | 3-4' | A deciduous shrubby perennial that grows in full or partial sun and slightly dry conditions. Cylindrical clusters of tiny, fragrant, white flowers arrive in the late spring and later turn to fruits. This plant adds nitrogen to the soil. |
|  | <i>Comptonia peregrina</i> | Sweet Fern | 2-4' | A spreading, colonizing nitrogen-fixing plant with slender upright stems with foliage appearing similar to fern fronds, which are fragrant when crushed. This shrub is useful as a ground cover for erosion control. |
|  | <i>Myrica pensylvanica</i> | Northern Bayberry | 5-7' | A semi-evergreen, woody shrub with a thicket-forming character and aromatic leaves, flowers, and berries. This shrub is well adapted to coastal areas. |
|  | <i>Rosa virginiana</i> | Virginia Rose | 2-6' | A shrub with many spreading branches, thorny stems, and pink flowers that bloom from June to August. Virginia rose is good for attracting wildlife due to its edible rose hips and thick cover. |
|  | <i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i> | Lowbush Blueberry | 6"-2' | Hardy, low-growing deciduous, twiggy shrub with urn-shaped white flowers and bluish-black edible fruits that matures in mid- to late-summer. |