

Gardening Advice from www.seasideplants.eu **NATURE'S PROTECTIVE ARMOUR** **against wind, sand and salt . . .**

Windy habitats have forced plants to evolve various ways to reduce water loss.

1. Grey foliated plants

These do particularly well on the coast because the surface of their leaves is covered in many fine hairs. The salt crystals cannot reach the leaves surface but only the tips of the hairs, so that the rain causes the salt crystals to drop off. This tomentum, as it is called covers in a few cases both the top and the undersurface of the leaves. There are many plants from New Zealand with this characteristic. In some cases the upper surface may be shiny while the under-surface is hairy.

2. High gloss

This is protective armour adopted by some plants. It is a film that prevents the leaves from absorbing the salt crystals deposited on them. (Eg. *Euonymus japonicus* and *Pittosporum tobira*)

3. No leaves

In a few cases Nature has allowed plants to dispense altogether with leaves in their normally accepted form. Instead they form tough shoots that are able to withstand high winds and salt-spray (Eg. *Spartium junceum*).

4. Tough epidermis

The leaves of some plants develop a specially tough skin or epidermis (Eg. *Hebes*). Besides using the doubling of the epidermis, the *Hebes* use another device to protect their growing points. An effective arrangement of the leaves allows the bud to develop behind successive pairs of leaves. This protection of the leaves is important, since many leaves are unable to grow on after storm damage because the leading growth has been killed.

5. Sticky gum

Some shrubs exude a sticky gum on the leaf (Eg. *Escalonia macrantha*) which protects the plant from salt laden winds.

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