

# Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, July 2020



## Garden Diary: Gardening in a Seaside Community- Lessons Learned

Having always been an inland gardener I had a lot to learn when I moved to Rockport.

**Planting zones, microclimates and climate challenges:** Officially, Rockport is considered to be in plant hardiness zone 6b, where average minimum winter temperatures range from -5 to 0 degrees. This information is important when choosing which plants will survive and thrive in your garden. What I have learned is that plants labeled for Zone 6 often do not survive our winters due in part I think, to the harsh winds coming off the ocean and our erratic spring thaw/freeze cycles.

Rockport also has many microclimates influenced by how close you live to the water, your wind exposure and the presence or absence of walls, large boulders or similar structures that hold heat. For example, daffodils just 2 blocks inland from where I live bloom 2-3 weeks earlier than mine do. I have learned, by killing many plants, to always buy plants that will thrive in lower zones (e.g. zones 3-5) than our 6b. You can also plant more vulnerable plants in the warmer microclimates of your garden.

Other climate challenges we have to contend with are salt spray during winter storms which can be carried blocks inland (wrapping prized plants and shrubs in burlap can protect against this) and road salt thrown up by street plowing. I sweep the sand/salt mixture off my roadside gardens while the soil is still frozen. You can also put up a burlap "fence" between your garden and the road and use pet safe de-icers (not rock salt) on your own property. This UMass website lists plants that are more resistant or vulnerable to road salt. [How to Reduce Plant Injury from Winter Salt Applications](#).



**Critters:** We are lucky to have a fairly low deer population in Rockport although it seems to be growing. If you can contain your garden with an 8 foot solid fence

you can probably keep them out. You can also plant deer resistant species, although, if they are hungry enough, deer will eat anything. A simple Google search will bring up lots of websites offering advice and lists of deer resistant plants. Here is one such site: [Deer-Proof Your Garden Naturally](#)

I have also learned the hard way how destructive rabbits can be. In just 2 years they killed 10 rose bushes and many other perennials in my garden, often just chewing plants off at the base. They also love crocuses; disappearing crocus flowers are an early indicator that you have rabbits around. I have found the repellent sprays to be fairly effective though work intensive to re-apply after every rain.



Plastic owls do not work! I also regularly entertain my neighbors by tearing out of my house when I see a rabbit, growling and barking and waving my arms in my best imitation of a large dog.

**Water restrictions:** There are many online lists of plants that can survive low water conditions. I cope with rain barrels, keeping a pan in the kitchen sink to collect all non-soapy water and using my bath water as alternative water sources for my plants. I also gave some thought to which plants were my highest priority to survive low water conditions so they get the water first.

The biggest problems are plants in pots which may need water several times a day in our increasingly hot summers so I just let them die and put them in the compost pile. Often people think their gardens need more water than they do. The rule of thumb is 1 inch per week for most shrubs and perennials. A rain gauge is a handy way to know exactly how much rain we get in any particular rain event. While shady conditions will slow the rate of water evaporation once you water beware of maple trees whose roots are close to the surface and suck up any available moisture.

I hope my thoughts will encourage you to share your own lessons learned through this newsletter.

—Submitted by Susan Patrick



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## The Garden Cart: Flowering Spurge

Dan Jaffe who spoke to the garden club last year recommended planting *Euphorbia corollata* or flowering spurge in the February 2017 issue of Fine Gardening. Luckily I didn't dismiss this plain-Jane plant when I saw it at Wolf Hill. The small mound of dusty green foliage did not indicate that it would become one of the stars of my late July garden.

The stems grow erect to 3 feet. A whorl of smooth, leaves surrounds the stem at the point where 3-7 flowering stalks branch off. Minute flowers surrounded by 5 white, round, petal-like bracts with yellow centers attach to rim of a cup.



Its lovely, abundant white flowers last for weeks. In some parts of the country it is referred to as "Redneck Baby's Breath" which gives you an idea of the airiness of the blooms. It will spread to form an open, airy mat in poor, dry soils where many other perennials struggle. It finishes the season with brilliant, orange to red autumn foliage, some of the longest-lasting fall color of any native perennial. It is grows east of the Rocky Mountains but it is not native to New England.

A toxic white latex in the leaves and stems keeps deer and other mammals away. Some gardeners may be sensitive to the sap and the sap is poisonous.

### Attributes:

Height: 3 feet  
Spread: 2 feet  
Hardiness: 3 to 9  
Exposure: Sun to Part Shade  
Soil Moisture: Dry to Average  
Maintenance: Low  
Ecoregion: All states east of the Rockies, except for New England  
Tolerance: Deer/rabbit resistant, salt and drought tolerant  
Attracts: Bees and other pollinators  
Ornamental Interest: Summer bloom, fall foliage



—Patty Hock

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

## Garden Reminders:

[What to do in your Garden this Month](#)



## Garden Clippings:

Welcome our new Members!

Pat Alto  
Joan Flynn  
Yvonne Forte  
Elvira Fulchino  
Mary Ann Kiely  
Donna LoGrasso  
Kauren Rasmussen  
Christine Southard  
Lori Kaiser

Please send a welcoming handshake. ✨

**Garden Events**

**Evening Member Meeting**

Monday, July 13<sup>th</sup>  
6:30 PM– Virtual Wine & Cheese Reception (BYO)  
7:00 PM- Presentation  
Speaker: Dan Jaffe Wilder  
“*Landscaping for Life*”

**Gloucester Garden Tour**

Saturday, July 11th  
10 AM, 12 PM & 2 PM  
Virtual ZOOM Tours