

Arctostaphylos 'Howard McMinn' - Manzanita



Habit and Cultural Information

Category: Shrub
Family: Ericaceae (Heaths, Heathers)
Origin: California (U.S.A.)
Evergreen: Yes
Flower Color: Light Pink
Bloomtime: Winter/Spring
Synonyms: (*A. densiflora* 'Howard McMinn')
Height: 6-10 feet
Width: 6-12 feet
Exposure: Sun or Shade
Drought Tolerant: Yes
Irrigation: Low Water Needs
Winter Hardiness: 0-10° F

Arctostaphylos 'Howard McMinn' (Manzanita) - A medium-sized, evergreen mounding shrub to 7 to 10 feet tall by as wide with a densely-branched structure - can be kept smaller by pruning. It has beautiful smooth dark red bark and narrow 3/4 to 1 1/2-inch-long shiny green leaves and from late winter into spring appear intensely showy clusters of many small white flowers, tinged with light pink.

Plant in full sun to light shade. Though it requires little irrigation in coastal gardens, this plant can tolerate occasional watering, even applied overhead, which makes it both drought and garden tolerant. It is hardy to 0-10 degrees F. This cultivar is considered by most to be one of the most dependable and adaptable of the manzanitas - what they called "without a doubt, everyone's manzanita" in *California Native Plants for the Garden* by Carol Bornstein, David Fross and Bart O'Brien. It can be grown in sandy or heavy soils on the coast in full sun and in inland gardens with some shade.

This cultivar is often erroneously listed as a cultivar of the rare Vine Hill Manzanita, *Arctostaphylos densiflora*, which is a smaller growing pink flowering species with a very restricted natural range near Sebastopol in Sonoma County. Current though it that this plant is definitely of hybrid origin and initially thought possibly a hybrid between *Arctostaphylos stanfordiana* and *A. densiflora* because these two species are found in this same Vine Hill area, but there is a good possibility that several other manzanita species such as *Arctostaphylos bakeri* and *A. manzanita* might also be involved in this hybrid. 'Howard McMinn' was first introduced by the Saratoga Horticultural Foundation in 1955 from plants given to them by Howard McMinn, the native plant author and Mills College Botany Professor. McMinn had cultivated a group of *Arctostaphylos* seedlings on the Mills College campus in Oakland from seedlings he had received from nurseryman Louis Edmunds in the spring of 1949 and he later suggested that the Saratoga Horticultural Foundation test these seedlings out. Besides the plant that was later named for McMinn, the cultivars 'Sentinel' and Harmony were all introduced from these seedlings, with 'Howard McMinn' becoming the most popular and later receiving the Award of Merit from the California Horticultural Society in 1956. The Saratoga Horticultural Foundation originally described it as a low shrub, growing to 5 feet tall, but in the half century since its introduction, it has become apparent that this plant can reach twice this height. We have grown it at our nursery since 1982.

The name *Arctostaphylos* was given to the genus by the French (of Scottish descent) naturalist Michel Adanson (1707-1778), who first named the circumboreal *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* for plants found in Europe. The name comes from the Greek words 'arktos' meaning "bear" and 'staphyle' meaning grapes in reference to bears eating the fruit and the common name Bearberry also references this fact. This description of *Arctostaphylos* 'Howard McMinn' is based on our research and our observations of this plant growing in the nursery, in our own garden and in other gardens. We would appreciate getting feedback of any kind from those who have any additional information about this plant, particularly if they disagree with what we have written.

