



SARA

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### Arctostaphylos 'Emerald Carpet'

The manzanitas are an extremely varied group of woody plants which have a considerable range and diversity in California, at their largest they approach the habit of small trees and at the other extreme are small, prostrate plants suitable for an alpine garden. Arctostaphylos 'Emerald Carpet' is one of a number of selected, native, ground-covering manzanitas and it can safely be described as being in the forefront of this group.

The origins of 'Emerald Carpet' are fortunately, reliably recorded and its known provenance should give a clue to its treatment and cultivation. The following is an extract from a letter written in 1969 by Percy Everett, then retired from the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, to Brian Gage of SHF concerning his collection of this fine plant:- "I got the cutting material a few years ago when I was on a collecting trip along the north coast. It was from Haven's Neck, north of Gualala. I took cuttings from several selected plants in the area all, presumably, hybrids between A. nummularia and A.uva-ursi (or a reasonable facsimile of A.uva-ursi). This one clone turned out to be a wonderfully uniform plant. In a row and a half, all the plants are identical in spread and height and very thick in foliage. The leaf colour is a bright brilliant green all year. Another quality noted this last winter is that none of the leaves and stems died back under the long siege of moisture; all other material adjacent did. I watched this plant with considerable interest and John Dourley, who took my place has thought it a fine plant. Finally Dr. Lenz, the Director, noted it and promptly dubbed it 'Emerald Carpet'".

Certainly this plant has subsequently proved to be one of the most reliable and successful ground-covering members of this genus yet to be introduced. It develops as a low growing, dense mat of wiry stems which are prostrate and adpressed to the ground: the stems are clothed with bright, emerald green leaves which maintain their vivid and lustrous appearance throughout the year. It will eventually mound to as much as eighteen inches tall and will spread to five or six feet in diameter, it is a thickly growing, uniform plant and produces a dense cover which effectively stifles weed emergence.

The production of flowers in young plants is normally sparse and even in established plantations it can rarely

ever be described as generous. In practice it is grown for the bright, green colour and the vivid nature of its foliage, and any flowering is merely an added bonus. The small clusters of flowers start as pink buds which open into white flowers in the late winter.

As with the greater majority of this genus, this plant will not succeed on poorly drained soils, however it will withstand more moisture than most other manzanitas and will grow and thrive in reasonably heavy soil conditions. By the same token it will also tolerate conventional levels of summer irrigation without the development of the usual leaf spot problems which plague most of this genus. It also appears to be reasonably tolerant of the various water mould fungi which limit the nursery production and cultivation of so many others of the genus Arctostaphylos, nor is stem die back, once the plant is established, a significant problem.

In common with most of the californian members of this genus, 'Emerald Carpet' can be very successfully employed in low water use landscapes. It is of course necessary to ensure that a sufficient amount of water is available in the first season, for the establishment of the plant from the nursery container into the landscape situation.

Despite its vigour and apparent tolerance of usual soil conditions and irrigation practices, this plant is by no means foolproof and it should always be planted so that natural drainage is encouraged. It should never be planted with the top of the root ball below the existing and surrounding soil level and for preference it should be planted on a small mound.

It is a perfectly hardy plant in most of lowland and coastal California and will withstand 20°F of frost.

'Emerald Carpet' was first offered by SHF in 1979 and at that time warranted the following observation "...this appears to be the toughest, most fungus resistant, easiest to grow manzanita ground cover yet!", the succeeding years have not so far made it necessary to cause any revision of that assessment.

Ground cover; evergreen; (low water use); flowering.