

Green Notes



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'Wild Dancer' landscape shrub rose

SHRUB SELECTION & CARE

Are your shrubs living up to your expectations? An attractive, healthy landscape begins with careful plant selection. Choosing the right shrub for a particular spot must be very difficult indeed, or there would not be so many examples of inappropriate choices leading to unattractive maintenance nightmares. The following guidelines for selection, planting, and care will help you avoid most of the problems that arise as your landscapes age.

Assess your site

1. **SUN EXPOSURE.** Does the site receive full sun all day, only morning sun, or very little sun at all? Plants that thrive in full sun require at least 6 hours of sun a day to perform well. Plants that prefer shade may tolerate morning sun, but should not be planted where they will receive sun in the afternoon during the warm months. Only a select group of shrubs will thrive and bloom in the shade.

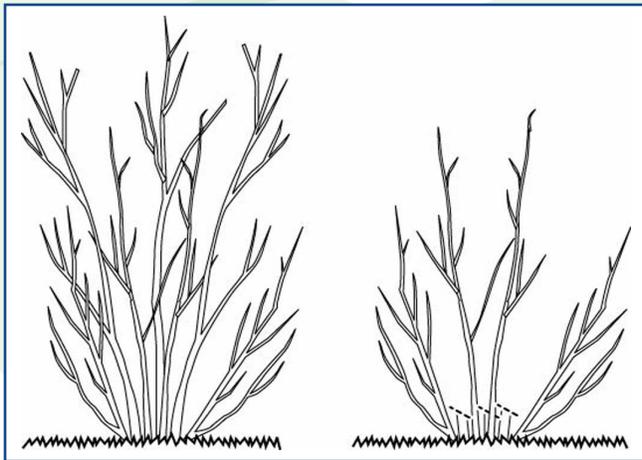
2. **SOIL TYPE and DRAINAGE.** Although many shrubs are tolerant of a wide range of soils, some require excellent drainage (*Arctostaphylos*, *Ceanothus*, *Salvia*), low pH (*Camellia*, *azalea*), or nutrient-rich soil high in organic matter (*Gardenia*). Their growth will be stunted and unhealthy if the soil is not to their liking.

Some problems may be remedied by planting on mounds or adding amendments, but for long-term health and lower maintenance, opt for plants that are suited to the site.

3. **WATER AVAILABILITY.** Match your plants to the irrigation, and only put plants with similar water needs on the same valve. You will always have to water to meet the needs of the thirstiest species, which can lead to waste or even damage to plants with lower water requirements. To check for plant water needs, see this publication beginning on p. 59: <http://www.water.ca.gov/wateruseefficiency/docs/wucols00.pdf>
4. **PLANTING SPACE.** Many problems arise because a shrub outgrows its planter bed and must be severely pruned on a regular basis to keep it away from buildings, walks, drives, and rights-of-way.

This pruning requires costly man-hours, fuel for equipment, and generates excess green waste. Heavy pruning also stresses and disfigures plants, and the cuts become potential openings for the spread of disease.

Use resources like *Sunset Western Garden Book* or *Landscape Plants for*



Thinning cuts (dotted lines on the right) used to encourage new interior growth

California Gardens to match your space with the MATURE SIZE of your shrubs. This information is also often available from the grower.

Space plants in a bed with no more than 1' of overlap of their eventual size. For example, shrubs that will reach 7' wide should be planted no less than 6' apart. This will yield a full planting without crowding.

Planting Basics

Dig a hole twice as wide and ONLY AS DEEP as the root ball. This will keep the plant from settling below grade later which can cause water to collect around the crown leading to rot.

Loosen any roots that are wound around the pot, and slice off the bottom roots if they are densely matted. This will cause the plant to generate new roots into the surrounding soil. Thoroughly break up the backfill soil before refilling the hole; tamp it down FIRMLY to get good soil/root contact, and then water well.

Download this free publication to give to your crew for training: <http://ucanr.edu/sites/sjcoeh/files/98898.pdf>

Long-term Care

If you carefully selected your shrubs for your soil and site, they will require NO SUPPLEMENTAL FERTILIZATION. In their first year, especially if planted in spring or summer, they will need

careful, regular watering to make sure they develop a good, deep root system. Avoid any pruning except to correct leggy or particularly unshapely growth.

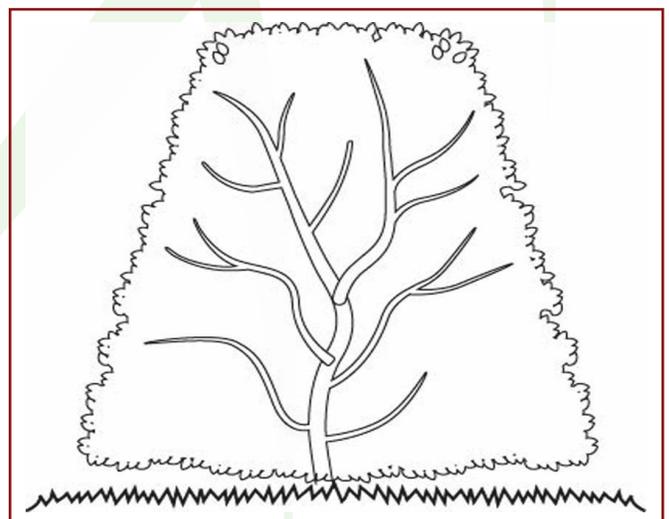
Maintaining a 2-3" layer of ORGANIC MULCH around the base of shrubs will help retain moisture, reduce weeds, and provide a healthier environment for the roots. Replenish every 2 or 3 years.

Most landscape plants will achieve a naturally attractive form with little or no pruning. Moderate tip pruning may be used to encourage bushier growth, and thinning (shown in the diagram at left) may be used if dense shrub growth begins to leave inside branches too bare.

If hedging is required, the form should be a pyramid (as shown below), rather than a muffin. This allows light to reach all the foliage, encouraging growth to the base, and prevents "bare-leg syndrome".

What to Avoid

- **Planting in June and July:** heat is very stressful for new plants. Wait until fall if at all possible.
- **Planting badly root-bound plants:** these should be returned to the supplier as they may never be able to outgrow kinked roots.
- **Planting in front of sprinkler heads:** growing shrubs will block the spray from reaching other parts of the bed.



The proper shape for hedging is a pyramid

COMING SOON!

GREEN NOTES



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WINTER

3

2013

SHRUB PRUNING MISTAKES

PRUNING ALL GRASS-LIKE PLANTS LIKE GRASSES. The most commonly mistreated plants are *Dietes bicolor* (Africa iris) and *Phormium tenax* (New Zealand flax). While grasses can grow back from the crown, these 2 plants are just disfigured and develop a 2-layered look. To control size, cut only the outside stalks to the ground, leaving the top in its natural form. Dead seed stalks can be cut back to the base with hand pruners.

HARD CUTTING INTO WOODY SHRUBS. Not only does this disfigure shrubs, it shortens their life. If a shrub has gotten so large that only hard pruning can keep it in bounds, **REPLACE IT WITH SOMETHING** appropriate to the space.



Disfigured *Dietes bicolor*



***Pittosporum* damaged from pruning with symptoms of disease on the right**



2-layered New Zealand flax

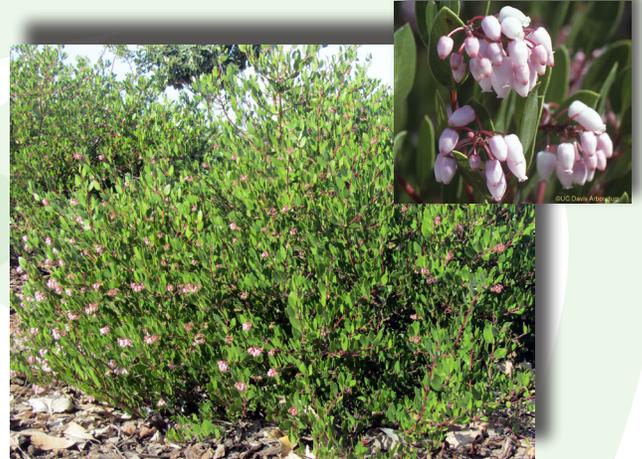
PLANT THIS

Arctostaphylos densiflora 'Howard McMinn'

'Howard McMinn' manzanita is a beautiful California native evergreen shrub with loads of pink, bell-shaped flowers on deep red stems in late winter and early spring. It is one of the manzanitas most tolerant of our heavy valley soils, and has very low water needs once it is well established.

It grows moderately slowly to an eventual height of 4-5 feet with an equal spread, but will spend many years in the 3' H x 4' W range. A very easy care shrub with year-round good looks.

These can be seen blooming in the demonstration gardens at the Robert J. Cabral Agricultural Center's Learning Landscape. (Address below.)



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