

MANZANITA

Latin: *Arctostaphylos manzanita*

Yuki: Kö-öch'-ē

Numlaki: Pā-göt'

TRADITIONAL MEDICINAL USES:

While the berries are the most highly prized part of the plant, manzanita leaves are also important. A leaf decoction is used as an external wash for headaches and sinus congestion. Leaf infusions are consumed to treat severe colds, but caution is advised as too much of this tea may cause nausea. Concow women make a chewed poultice of the leaves to treat wounds and sores. A poultice of the mashed bark is used as a general healing medicine. A strong decoction of the leaves and bark is used to treat gastrointestinal upset. Manzanita berries are used ceremonially by many tribes, and their leaves may be dried and added to tobacco mixtures.

TRADITIONAL EDIBLE USES:

Manzanita berries may be eaten raw or dried for later. They're used in all kinds of recipes, including jams, puddings, and mush. Mixing mashed fruit with water before straining makes a delicious beverage. The fruit with its seeds is ground into a paste to make mush or formed into patties, then dried and consumed later. Dried patties are sometimes crushed or powdered and used as seasoning. The berries are high in pectin and are often cooked down into a jelly that is served with sweet or savory dishes. Manzanita berries can be used to make a tasty cider. Strained manzanita juice may also be fermented into a lightly alcoholic beverage or vinegar.

Manzanitas can be found in the northern coastal ranges, California's coast, and reaching into the Cascades and Sierra Nevada foothills. They can occupy a wide variety of soils depending on the specific species; however, the common manzanita can thrive on rocky slopes with clay and sandy soils. They have also been noted to grow in chaparral areas that often have shallow and rocky soils.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

While Manzanita berries are generally considered safe for human consumption, overeating can lead to gastrointestinal upset. Their leaves have been found to contain at least 8% tannins, which should be considered when consuming them or making tea. However, tannins are easily broken down by boiling in water, so proper preparation is key.

STRUCTURE & BARK

The manzanita can be both a shrub and a tree, ranging from 2 feet to 10 feet tall. Their most prominent characteristic is their red to reddish-brown bark, which has been traditionally used to make spoons, pipes, and tools. Younger trees and shrubs have bark that appears to be peeling, while as these plants mature, it smooths out.

LEAVES

Their branches grow leaves that are arranged oppositely on the branch. The leaves are dark green on top and pale green underneath, with younger leaves sometimes having a rosy tint on the edges. Depending on the species, they can range from ovate to elliptic in shape with smooth margins.

FLOWERS

Their flowers are small and bell-shaped, consisting of 5 to 20 fused petals and ranging in color from white to pink. They are arranged in dense panicles with 5 to 20 flowers and typically bloom in the spring from March to May. These clusters are usually at the ends of the branches, making it easier for pollinators to access them.

BERRIES

The name "manzanita" is derived from Spanish, meaning "small apples," referring to its berries. The berries are small and round, ranging in color from red to brownish-red. They measure from 1/4 inch to 1/2 inch in size and have a firm texture with a tart taste. As they mature, they can dry out and harden. They have been an important food source for both Indigenous peoples and the wildlife surrounding them.



IDENTIFICATION is KEY



The Pacific madrone has the same reddish-brown bark but will peel back to reveal a green layer. Although leaves may be similar in shape, the Pacific madrone has significantly longer leaves. While the Pacific madrone berries are also edible, they are notably bland and bitter.