

February Meeting Recap

The speaker for the February meeting of the Southern California Horticulture Society was Bart O'Brien speaking about *Manzanitas for Every Garden*. Bart move north from the Southern California area late in 2013 to become the Manager/Director of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden (RPBG) in Tilden Regional Park in the Berkeley Hills. Bart had long been a fixture in the horticultural community in our area, from his many publications to his work at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden and elsewhere and his many years on the Board of SCHS. It was wonderful to have Bart back, speaking on a subject near and dear to him. Bart has been growing and working with Manzanitas since the 1980s and had many things to tell us about using them in our gardens. The most important factor in keeping them alive and healthy is knowing when to cease watering them. As gardeners our inclination to 'help' a plant through a dry spell may be the very thing that kills it if that plant is adapted for long periods of drought. Bart was adamant that overwatering is the single worst thing for Manzanitas. His recommendations on how to choose the right *Arctostaphylos* for your area, and garden will be helpful to anyone considering adding one of these beautiful shrubs to their seasonally-dry garden (or in a container if you have no other choice). Thank you, Bart for an illuminating talk about one of the treasures among California native plants. Thank you to all the SCHS members who help arrange the speakers and subjects; those who help set up the logistics and mechanics of the meeting; and everyone who stays to help clean up. Thank you.

—Steven Gerischer



Manzanita barrens, Santa Cruz Island.

SHARING SECRETS

In February, we asked you to answer "Do you grow Manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos*) and which are your favorites, and why?" and here are some of your responses. Read more on our SCHS MemberLodge website, schs.memberlodge.org.

My favorite Manzanita is *Arctostaphylos densiflora* 'Howard McMinn'. It is the first Manzanita I learned about at the Mildred Mathias garden at UCLA where they had a beautiful example.

Manzanitas planted in our sandy soil often struggle but Howard McMinn is a survivor and thrives here as well as in heavier soils. I often plant Howard McMinn in gardens with *Ceanothus* 'Ray Hartman' (Calif Lilac) and refer to them as Howard and Ray.

—Mimi Andersen in Manhattten Beach CA.

I like *Arctostaphylos* 'Howard McMinn'.

—Jim Jaeger

Yes we grow a number of them. Until recently they were beautiful. However this past year we lost two mature specimens of Refugio Manzanita to what I felt was fireblight but others insisted wasn't but they could offer nothing more than that. The symptoms were exactly what I was trained to identify as fireblight. They were crushing losses and not our only ones. Four smaller specimens of equal age and maturity but differing variety were lost, too, and our last large specimen is showing the same problems. Those we replanted with died almost immediately. We are facing the reality that we may never be able to grow them again. Because we have fast draining soil that is not water retentive, we have been hard hit by the drought. However it appears we are ground zero these days for a resurgence of armillaria, water mold fungi and two newly introduced species of tree killing borer beetle larvae. The other day we came home from being gone a week and found a twenty year old *Schefflera arboricola*, that had only recently reached majestic maturity, had just upped and died. About the Manzanitas, the way we did or did not water could have exacerbated the situation but there was absolutely no knowledgeable guidance available. We have found no consulting arborist who can offer any degree of certainty regarding what pathogens killed our *Arctostaphylos* but we found pruning out dead branches/limbs was not a solution. It has been a frustrating experience.

—Catherine Pannell and Robert Waters, Downey, California