North state residents are all too familiar with long, hot summers and their travails in the landscape. Dry conditions, smoke-filled skies, and prolonged above-average temperatures this summer accentuated the challenges of keeping our yards looking fresh and healthy.

But there are California native plants adapted to our region’s dry, hot climate that look exceptionally vibrant—even at this time of year. One is *Arctostaphylos densiflora* ‘Howard McMinn’, commonly called Howard McMinn manzanita or Vine Hill manzanita. The evergreen shrub was introduced in 1955 by Mills College botanist *Howard McMinn*. He discovered and collected the seeds from a stand of plants in the foothills near Sebastopol. In the ensuing years since it was discovered and grown commercially, the manzanita has proven to be one of the best California natives for both urban and natural landscapes in all regions of California. It performs superbly in Shasta County.

Howard McMinn manzanita tolerates drought, as well as regular water. So, if necessary, it could be planted adjacent to lawn sprinklers. It prefers full sun but will tolerate light shade and can be planted in and around oaks, as it is resistant to oak root fungus. The manzanita will grow almost as well in heavy clay soil as it does in a well-drained environment. And it is completely deer resistant.
A handsome shrub, it grows to 6 to 8 feet high at maturity, with an equal spread. It takes well to pruning; lifting its branches as it matures for a display of a striking, red bark trunk would be a wonderful accent in any garden.

If you are looking for a transition plant between your formal plantings and the more natural landscape, Howard McMinn is perfect. It is a great screen shrub too, although, it is a slow grower. But if you have the patience, it is worth the wait.

Year-round interest is another advantage of adding this shrub to your garden. Tiny clusters of pink blooms appear in late February and March and last approximately six weeks. During that time it provides food for hummingbirds when not a lot of other natural sources are available. If we are having a warm spell, you also will see bees collecting nectar during the bloom time.

New leaf growth in late spring is a vibrant green and reflects the freshness of the season. When quail and other ground birds are nesting and foraging in early summer, they will find an abundance of berries. And during the dog days, there is no finer-looking shrub to be found stoically holding its own until the autumn rains arrive.

You can view Howard McMinn manzanita at Turtle Bay’s McConnell Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, and there is a specimen at the Matson, Mowder, Howe Celebration Garden in front of North Valley Art League Gallery in Caldwell Park in Redding.

Howard McMinn manzanita is the ideal plant for a novice gardener. October is the perfect planting time for our gardens and landscapes. The Shasta Chapter of the California Native Plant Society will have Howard McMinn manzanita at its fall plant sale, from 8 AM to 2 PM, October 13, at Shasta College.