
Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

Heather Family

Why Choose It?

Glossy leaves that stay green all year, bright red berries that glisten into winter—as C.L. Hitchcock, dean of Northwest botany, wrote: “one of the finest groundcovers known.” Happy in full sun to part shade and dry soils, it’s a well-mannered alternative to that thug, English ivy.



Photo: Ben Legler

In the Garden

Have a place you hate to mow? A boring parking strip? A retaining wall or rockery that could use a cascade of green? Kinnikinnick is a great choice. It’s low maintenance, drought tolerant, and a pal to birds (like evening grosbeaks and hummingbirds) and insects (like bees and brown elfin butterflies).

The Facts

This mat-forming shrub has woody reddish-brown branches, 6 to 8 inches tall. Its pinkish clusters of hanging bell-shaped flowers appear from March to June. The eye-catching red berries hang on and on, from July to February. While it grows best in sunny well-drained sites, Kinnikinnick can tolerate heavier soils and some shade. Water it well during its first two dry seasons.

Where to See It

Kinnikinnick can be found from the coast to the subalpine zone. Look for it on sandy slopes, exposed rocky banks, dry subalpine meadows, and coniferous forests.

And, hey, what about its berry, berry bland berries?

Kinnikinnick has many names, most referring to its fruits. *Arctostaphylos* (Greek) and *uva-ursi* (Latin) both mean “bear grapes.” Manzanita means “little apple” in Spanish, and mealberry refers to the berries’ texture and insipidity—to be tasty they need to be fried or stewed. And what about the name kinnikinnick itself? It’s an Algonquian word referring to the dried leaves’ use in smoking mixtures.



Photo: Ben Legler

You can find out more information about native plants, including where to buy them, from the Washington Native Plant Society.

www.wnps.org

206-527-3210 or 1-888-288-8022



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Native Plant Spotlights

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