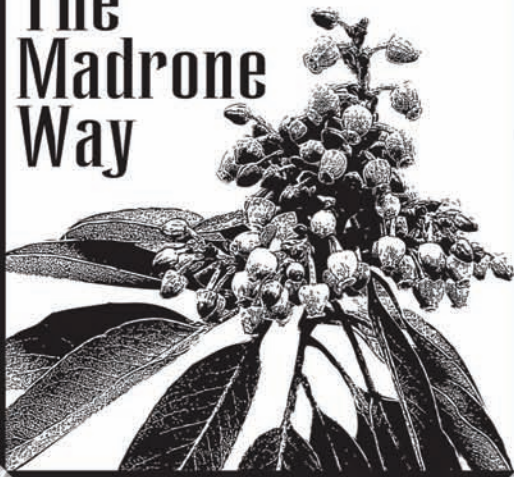


THE Texas Madrone
Arbutus xalapensis

PLANTING & CARE

The Madrone Way



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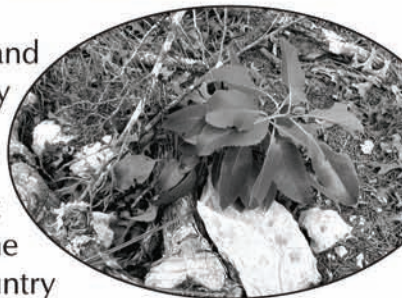
The Texas Madrone has been called “the Sacred Tree of the Hill Country”, growing in isolated colonies throughout Trans-Pecos mountains and the Edwards Plateau. After flowering in early Spring, their cinnamon-brown bark peels in June, revealing the cream to light green to pink new bark beneath that gives them the name Lady’s Legs and Naked Indians, although they date to Ancient times prior to either ladies or native Americans. Bright red-orange fruit in the Fall provides a brilliant accent on the hills as well as food for birds and animals.

Though striking and beautiful, they are difficult so far to cultivate, transplant and grow. The present Hill Country is probably a bit different from the Madrone’s original environment.

Extremely sensitive roots and a possible mycorrhizal symbiosis with their plant allies and soil present even more difficult conditions.

These Ancient Ones hopefully will not continue to decline and lose habitat that currently plague the present colonies. They must be understood, grown and shared.

I have limited experience on how Madrones transplant, adapt and grow. Any questions or comments would be immensely appreciated and can be sent to TheMadroneWay@gmail.com. Thank you in advance. I am still learning. That is The Madrone Way.



A 2-year-old 4-inch seedling after two years planted in the Hill Country. Trunk length now approximately 9 inches.

THE TEXAS MADRONE

FIRST: If you plan on keeping them in the fiber pot, water when they feel dry and light, about every 36 hours unless it rains. Deep water.

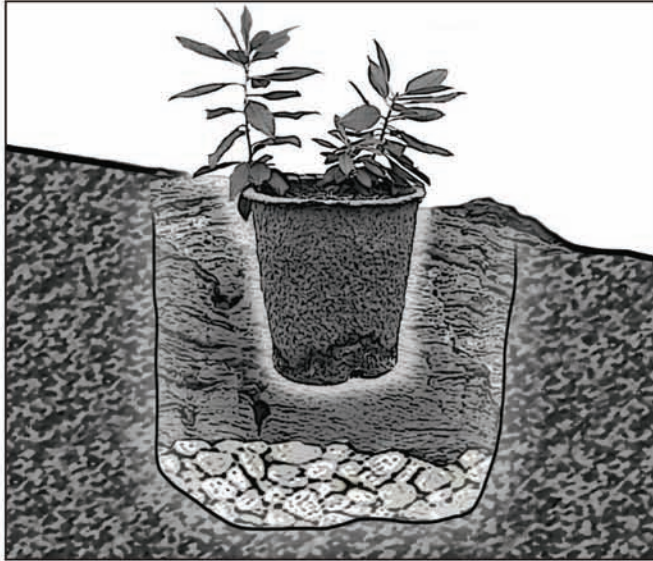
Do not plant outside of its native range— the Trans-Pecos mountains and the Edwards Plateau/Hill Country. They live here for a Reason. In the Hill Country, hard rock alternates with softer caliche along ridges where Madrones grow. Our infrequent rains drip thru the caliche, pooling along the harder stone, then tapped by Madrones.

Too much water, which many people understandably supply, invites root disease compounded by the reduced inability to quickly create new roots. So the idea is to convince them to find the water down in the land. Your primary considerations are site and drainage.

SITE: Find a shady understory environment facing east or north to protect from strong sunlight, preferably on a slightly-angled slope for drainage. They will grow out of the understory eventually but require cool, indirect light to begin. A nearby oak or cedar/juniper will not compete since in Nature they are often symbiotic.



A 2-year-old root system, light and inquisitive, which will root out the fiber bottom after a year.



Make sure your hole drains water after 20-30 minutes. Then fill with half-native soil and half-humus. Line the bottom with rock to assure drainage during storms.

DRAINAGE: Dig the hole twice as deep and twice as wide as the pot. Save the soil which comes out and mix with humus. Next, pour a gallon of water into the hole. Watch for 20-30 minutes. You are hoping the water will not stand, but will start draining into the land, to seek out pooled water below and trace this trail through the ground for the Madrone's roots. If the water doesn't drain in an hour, find another site. You can use a rock bar on solid rock slabs if close to your surface, but you are watching to see how quickly the Madrone roots will have to run to properly establish.

Put medium-size native rocks in the bottom to help aerate. Plant by filling the hole with your half-native/half-humus soil mix.

Rocks around the top after planting protects from armadillos and other rooters and diggers.

CARE: Sprinkler systems are not a good idea for Madrones. They create a lazy, soft tree whose roots stay high in the ground, especially with a richer soil. Watering a gallon a week if there is no rain is usually enough, but that depends on the site and weather. Again, you are training the roots to search for themselves and establish deep.

Only lightly fertilize in the Spring once you see them break new growth. An organic 3-5-2 will work. They are very ascetic; once established, their roots find what they need.

GROWTH: They grow very slowly in the Hill Country, a function of water, but when they tap into an aquifer or water pool, can annually grow (rarely) 12-18 inches, although they won't do this year after year.



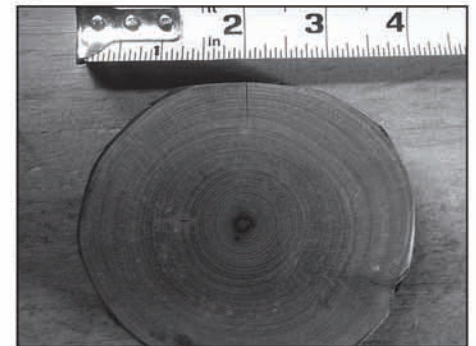
The Madrone flowers in early April with a unique inverted-urn structure that attracts specific pollinators, producing the bright-red-orange berries of Fall.

PROBLEMS: Keep them moist but not soggy, and dry before watering. They have minimal or no root hairs, making them especially sensitive to drying out. Symptoms of too much water appear the same as not enough water—wilting with a grayish color.

Dark spots on leaves, especially during Spring or Fall rains when the weather's cooler, are normal.

Leaf-droop in nature occurs right after flowering, and they appear to be wilting. This is normal. While Madrones tapped into a good ground water source will keep all their leaves, when the weather's too dry, they drop lower ones. They are often classified as semi-deciduous.

Deer? Of course, they devour anything. Small Madrones need to be protected from browsing by deer, goats, horses and cattle. Deer will browse even older trees over 10-feet tall. They browse at the 4-foot level, but with good rains the branches can re-leaf.



With paper-thin bark and growth at the mercy of Texas rains, a Madrone's age in nature can be difficult to assess. This 4-inch caliper trunk by ring-count could easily be fifty or more years old.