



Artemisia californica 'Canyon Gray'

This prostrate form of the native Coastal Sagebrush occurred, as a chance seedling aberration, in the wild on San Miguel Island in Santa Barbara County. It was noticed and collected in 1972 by Dr. Ralph Philbrick and subsequently propagated, named and introduced by the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

Initially it might well be difficult to envisage this very ornamental, ground hugging plant as being a variety of Artemisia californica, which in itself would hardly be regarded as a normally garden worthy subject. It is a staggeringly vigorous subject in cultivation, when its origins are considered, as it will establish and spread quite dramatically on a restricted summer water supply. Although watering is required to establish virtually any container grown plant in the landscape or garden situation, this plant will succeed even on relatively infrequent administrations and will subsequently survive on very little supplementary watering.

This plant is a much needed and first class addition to the available spectrum of native ground cover subjects suitable for use in arid land situations, such as hillside and rockery plantings or in those 'low water usage' native plant gardens which are currently in vogue. Its value for erosion control in steep situations should also not be overlooked.

The stems produce a flat, dense, layered carpet which will spread to cover an area seven or eight feet in diameter and only six to eight inches thick. These stems carry the finely cut, feathery foliage on short internodes, which adds to the density effect. The leaves in their early stages are a light, shiny, silver grey; the older foliage maturing to a darker matt of metallic grey so that the silver grey of the new foliage overlies the older stems of darker leaves.

As the advantage of this plant is its very prostrate and adressed habit, it would inevitably benefit from an annual pruning each late winter, in order to prevent the mat thickening from the accumulation of a bottom layer of old and defoliated stems, and also keep the entire plant fully clothed with new stems. Despite its provenance this is a hardy plant withstanding temperatures down to about 15°F.

Flower production on this plant is minimal or even non-existent and so the plantings do not suffer from the defacing and tired effect of massive quantities of old flowering shoots which are often a problem with shrubby members of the Asteraceae in the californian climate.

The foliage of this plant is aromatic and is typical of the parent sagebrush.

One other valuable attribute of this plant as a landscape ground cover subject is that it appears to be completely devoid of a snail population. It would appear that these pests do not feed on the plant nor is it a harbour for them.

The prefix 'Canyon' in the cultivar name designates it as an introduction of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

Low water use; ground cover; evergreen; non-flowering; aromatic foliage; snail free.