



## SARATOGA HORTICULTURAL FOUNDATION, INC.

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### Carpenteria californica

The 'Bush Anemone' is not only one of California's most beautiful native plants, it is also one of its rarest endemic species. It has a very restricted geographical distribution; within a range, longitudinally of only twenty miles or so, in Fresno County. It occurs on sparsely wooded slopes at elevations of between 1,500 and 4,000 feet in the San Joaquin and King's River canyon region. Often it is locally abundant within this area.

The original location for the first discovery of this plant was for long in doubt, as it had been discovered and collected as a pressed specimen by Fremont during his 1845 expedition - on his southward trek down the Central Valley it is now known that he mistook the King's River for the Kern and by travelling up this river made an abortive attempt to cross the Sierra Nevada, on turning back he probably found this plant on a tributary of the King's. Despite many searches in the Sierras the plant was not seen again for thirty years until it was shown to the California Academy of Sciences in September 1876 by Gustav Eisen, it had been found and hence rediscovered in 1875 between Tollhouse and Ockenden in Fresno County.

Carpenteria is a monotypic genus and is most closely allied to Philadelphus. It develops into a multi-stemmed, twiggy, evergreen, woody shrub, which may attain a height of eight to twelve feet. The leaves are four to five inches long and are narrow linear, lanceolate in shape, with revolute margins; the upper surface is a dark glossy green and the undersides are covered with a close, short, dense, white pubescence - all of these characteristics being part of its water conserving strategy. The older stems develop an exfoliating bark which peels to reveal a bright ornamental, yellowish tan bark. Many of the plants as they grow naturally are leggy and drooping in habit - these characteristics are also often seen in cultivated plants of seedling origin, this has detracted from the general acceptance of it as a worthwhile garden plant - it being deemed to be too untidy. It can however be readily developed into a compact and useful shrub by judicious pinching and pruning but this treatment is not necessarily available in every situation. The development and selection of a range of natural compact, floriferous cultivars would therefore be a valuable asset.

The Bush Anemone is tolerant of most garden irrigation regimes provided that the soil drainage is good, but it

is also capable of growing quite satisfactorily without summer watering if it is well established with water in its first couple of seasons. When grown under stress or starved, it is susceptible to aphid attack to such an extent that the plant can be disfigured. It is also reputed to be resistant to Oak root fungus although this is less verifiable.

Carpenteria is much hardier than its exotic appearance would suggest, it is quite capable of tolerating frost to the order of 20°F; perhaps this is to be expected when the elevation of its habitat is considered. In its natural habitat it is a native of light woodland or a marginal chapparal community and as such will tolerate full sun and heat except in extreme exposures such as the that experienced in the Central Valley where it would benefit from light shade.

The foliage is very bitter and astringent in taste and in consequence it is not readily browsed either by sheep or by deer.

The flowers are fragrant and are normally up to three inches or so in diameter; they consist of five to seven flat, roundish, pure white petals which surround a central boss of brilliant yellow stamens. The number of flowers and their size, together with their disposition on the stem is a very variable factor in any seedling population. The flowering season, depending on location, is from May to September - with a peak in June and July.

Perhaps the most sought after named cultivar is 'Ladham's Variety' which was selected many years ago in England and is characterised by having individual flowers some four inches across, unfortunately it does not yet appear to be available in California.

'Elizabeth' is the only cultivar which is currently, commercially available, it was collected as cuttings by Wayne Roderick who wrote - 'In 1971 I spent several days with friends looking at all the plants of Carpenteria californica that we could get to. We found one so different that it stood out far beyond the rest. This plant had small flowers but in masses up to 20 to a cluster. In fact every terminal had a cluster.' This selection has proved to adapt well to cultivation and grows into a relatively compact, free flowering bush; it is quite distinct and is readily recognised by the erect, compact, terminal, flower clusters which contain numerous (20+) individual flowers each about 2 inches in diameter. It was named to honour Elizabeth McClintock.

Evergreen; flowering; low water use: native.