

Vitex negundo 'Heterophylla' Cut-Leaf Chastetree¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

INTRODUCTION

Cut-Leaf Chastetree can be grown as a large, deciduous, multistemmed shrub or small, 10 to 15 feet tall tree, and is noteworthy for its showy, summer display (late springtime in the deep South) of fragrant, upwardly-pointing, terminal panicles of lavender blooms which are quite attractive to butterflies and bees (Fig. 1). The tree is often planted where honey is marketed to promote excellent honey production. The trunk is gray and blocky and somewhat ornamental. The highly dissected leaves of Cut-leaf Chastetree are shaped like Cut-leaf Japanese Maple and were once believed to have sedative effects. *Vitex* has the common name "Chastetree" since Athenian women used the leaves in their beds to keep themselves chaste during the feasts of Ceres. *Vitex* seeds itself into landscaped beds and can become somewhat weedy.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Vitex negundo* 'Heterophylla'

Pronunciation: VYE-tecks nee-GUHN-doe

Common name(s): Cut-Leaf Chastetree, Cut-Leaf Vitex

Family: *Verbenaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 6 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

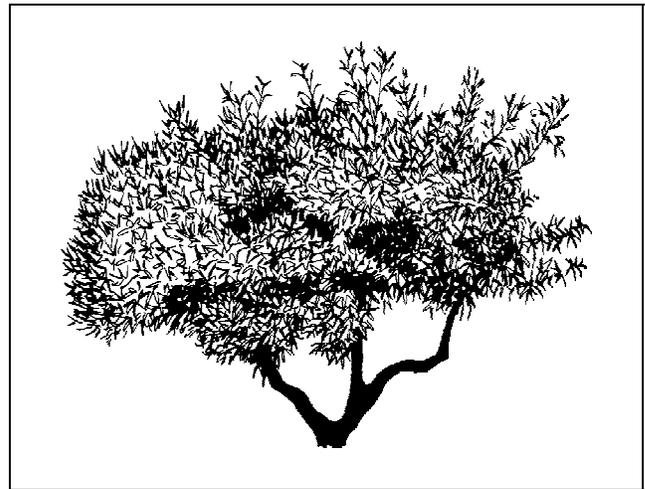


Figure 1. Middle-aged Cut-Leaf Chastetree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 10 to 18 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; spreading

Crown density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite; whorled (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: palmately compound

Leaflet margin: incised; parted; serrate

Leaflet shape: lanceolate

Leaflet venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous; fragrant

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2. Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaflet blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: lavender

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; showy; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with

several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: No entries found.

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree



Figure 3. Foliage of Cut-Leaf Chastetree.

multistemmed shrub. Chastetree is a fast-grower and can easily recover its size when cold weather prunes it. Very similar to *Vitex agnus-castus*, which also is called Chastetree, *Vitex negundo* is more cold hardy (grows in USDA hardiness zone 6a). *Vitex agnus-castus* may survive in USDA hardiness zone 6a if protected from winter winds.

Propagate by softwood cuttings in early summer or by seeds.

Pests

No pests are of major concern.

Diseases

Leaf spot can almost defoliate the tree. Root rot can cause decline in soils which are kept too moist.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Chastetree is used effectively in the mixed shrubby border or as a specimen. It is usually seen as a shrub with a multiple trunk but can be trained in the nursery into a tree with one or several trunks if so desired. Occasionally used as a street or median tree since it will not grow up and into powerlines, but branches tend to droop toward the ground and would hinder traffic visibility if planted too close to the street. Median planting would be fine if there is adequate horizontal space for the crown to develop and spread. Since the flowers attract bees, locate it accordingly.

Chastetree prefers a loose, well-drained soil that is moist or on the dry side, not wet, but will tolerate drained clay or sandy soils. The tree often suffers from dieback in organic, mucky, or other soil which is kept too moist, such as in the New Orleans or Dallas areas. Chastetree should be planted in full sun or light shade, and will tolerate hot weather extremely well, moderate salt air exposure and alkaline soil.

In the colder regions (USDA hardiness zones 6b and 7), Chastetree can be killed to the ground by severe winters and is more often seen as a