Vitex trifolia ‘Variegata’

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Introduction

This fast growing shrub is popular for its variegated foliage and pretty blue flowers (Fig. 1). Vitex will reach a height of 10 to 12 feet and quickly becomes tree-like if neglected or trained to encourage multi-trunk development. However, this plant creates a nice, dense shrub if it is properly pruned and will be nearly prostrate if planted on a sandy beach. The trifoliate evergreen leaves are gray-green with white marginal variegation. These soft leaves have grayish pubescence on their underside and smell pungent when crushed. Attractive blue or lavender flowers with white spots appear in terminal clusters during the summertime. These beautiful flowers are followed by small, brown drupes.

General Information

Scientific name: Vitex trifolia ‘Variegata’
Pronunciation: VYE-tecks try-FOLE-lee-uh
Common name(s): Variegated Vitex
Family: Verbenaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: hedge; border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; trained as a standard
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 10 to 20 feet
Spread: 8 to 12 feet
Plant habit: round
Plant density: dense
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine

Figure 1. Variegated Vitex.
Vitex trifolia 'Variegata' -- Variegated Vitex

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: trifoliate
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen; fragrant
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: variegated
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: blue
Flower characteristic: summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: unknown
Fruit cover: unknown
Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

October 1999
Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Vitex trifolia ‘Variegata’ creates a wonderful hedge, screen, and border. It is commonly planted in mass but also makes a great specimen plant. Rapidly growing out of bounds as a shrub, Vitex should be used in a large space or where its weedy growth can be easily pruned, although pruning reduces the flower display. Vitex works well as a screen or in a large-scale shrub border. It also is well suited for planting in a container where it looks nice trained into a small tree.

To obtain an attractive, compact hedge, plant this shrub in full sun. Vitex also needs a well-drained, but moist, sandy soil. It is moderately drought tolerant and will endure some salt spray. Vitex is high maintenance in terms of pruning and should be fertilized twice a year. It is not cold tolerant and needs a protected location in central Florida.

Vitex is commonly propagated by cuttings during the summer.

Pests and Diseases

Mushroom root rot and mites are frequent problems for Vitex.