



# *Vitex negundo* 'Heterophylla' Cut-Leaf Chastetree<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## 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

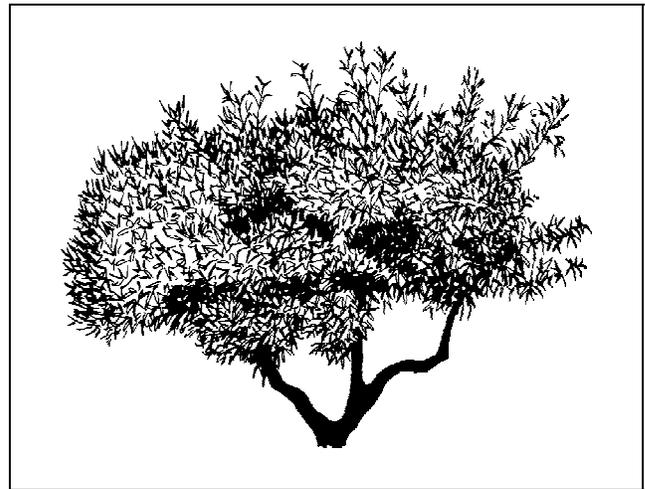


Figure 1. Middle-aged Cut-Leaf Chastetree.

## 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

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-668, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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