



Vitex Chaste Tree

Vitex agnus-castus

Verbain Family (Verbenaceae)

Zones: 7-10

Full Sun to Partial Shade

Moderate Water

Location: Medicinal Garden

Are you looking for a unique plant, something lovely with purplish flowers that loves the heat? You might want to consider *Vitex*, a great under-utilized shrub that is native to Europe, Asia and parts of Africa. The Garden currently has two varieties - *Vitex negundo 'Heterophylla'* in the Fragrance Garden and *Vitex angus-castus* in the Medicinal Garden. *Vitex negundo* is considered hardier and is listed as a zone six or a shaky five. *Vitex angus-castus* is not as hardy as *V. negundo*. Both, however, have performed well in the Garden at 5000 feet and above. *Vitex*'s fragrant flowers are lavender to violet in color, and are presented on upright spikes above the foliage. They bloom in late summer on the current season's growth and will continue to bloom sporadically as the plant continues to grow. Although the Chaste Tree has no fall color, the grayish-green foliage is attractive even when it's not in flower. *Vitex* prefers full sun, well-drained soil (especially in the winter) and hot weather! It also has little problem with pests as the foliage has been shown to contain a natural insect repellent.

Chaste Trees often die back to the ground during the winter in Utah so it's important to prune back in the spring to help new growth. It is somewhat late to emerge, so be patient. Sizes vary depending on the species and climate. In warmer areas where winter dieback is not an issue, they can reach a height of 10 to 20 feet. Sizes listed below are typical for our location. The different species and their cultivars have other attributes to consider when making a selection. The serrated foliage on *Vitex negundo 'Heterophylla'* gives it a fine leaf texture. It grows to approximately three feet at Red Butte Garden.

The foliage of *Vitex negundo 'Inisia'* is even more finely serrated. *V. n. 'Cannabifolia'* has leaves shaped similar to cannabis. The Garden staff say the flowers are better and longer lasting on *V. angus-castus*. This species grows a bit larger and has reached around six feet tall in the Garden. Cultivars of *V. angus-castus* offer a wide variety of flower color from white, pink, lavender and purple.

Chaste Tree isn't as common in the industry as we would like. If you can't find it locally, Forest Farm in Oregon lists a few varieties on their web site, WWW.FORESTFARM.COM, and offers mail order. Thanks to Michael Dirr, Manual of Woody Landscape Plants for much of the information included in this plant profile.