

Vitex agnus-castus (Chaste tree)

Chaste tree is a deciduous, multi-trunked shrub or small tree native to southern Europe and western Asia. Fragrant pink, purple-lavendar, or white flower clusters bloom June to September. Individual flowers have five petals and ap-



pear in loose panicles up to 12-in. long. Flowers attract birds, butterflies and bees, which use the flowers to produce honey.

Leaves, flowers, and seeds are aromatic with a spice-like scent similar to crushed sage. There is no significant fall leaf color.

Chaste tree does best in hot weather and is hardy in zones 7 to 8. Pruning can be done in early spring as flowering occurs on new wood. Removing old blooms will encourage new growth with a repeat bloom in about 6 weeks. This long-lived specimen's rapid growth rate can

add up to 24-in. per year in height (larger varieties are fast growers), so give it plenty of room to grow.

Some smaller cultivars like 'Blue Diddley' and 'Blue Puffball' can be grown as 3- to 6-ft. shrubs; other cultivars such as 'Cooke's Blue', 'Cooke's Pink', or 'Cooke's Purple' can grow as tall as 25 to 30 feet with the same spread. There are also many cultivars of various sizes in between.

Chaste tree is resistant to most insect pests and diseases. If planted in soil that is not well-drained or remains wet, it can succumb to root rot and die-back. Leaf spots can be a problem, especially if overhead irrigation is used. Several cultivars are available that have resistance to leaf spot diseases. Chaste tree is resistant to damage by deer and is moderately salt tolerant. It has good drought tolerance once established. Because it freely reseeds, it can become weedy.



Cultivars include:

'Abbeville Blue' -- blue flowers, 10 to 20'; 'Alba' -- white blooms; 'Blue Diddley' -- low growing to 72", blue flowers; 'Blue Puffball' -- low growing to 4', blue flowers; 'Blushing Spires' -- pink flowers; 'Delta Blues' -- more compact variety to 10'; 'Latifolia' -- blue/lavender blooms, 15'; 'Montrose Purple' -- to 25', blue flowers; 'Pink Sensation' -- light pink flowers, to 15'; 'Rosea' -- to 10', pink flowers; 'Salinas Pink' -- true pink flowers.

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 For more information on gardening in Brunswick County, please call the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Office, 910.253.2610.

SOURCES:

Vitex agnus-castus (Chasteberry, Chastetree, Chaste Tree, Lilac chastetree, Monk's Pepper, Texas lilac) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox (ncsu.edu)
<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/chastetree/#:~:text=Chastetree%20%28Vitex%20agnus-castu%20s%29%20may%20be%20grown%20as,tree%20native%20to%20southern%20Europe%20and%20western%20Asia>