



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Ceanothus is a Showy Shrub (May 14, 2022)

by Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Ceanothus is a diverse group of shrubs called by the common nicknames "Wild lilac" and "California lilac", since the majority of species are native to California. It's easy to find a spot for Ceanothus in any landscape, for there is a wide range in their growth habit. Some can be small ground cover varieties, others are medium size shrubs, and still others may be classified as small trees. Most are evergreen.

Ceanothus is among the most popular western native plants, especially valued for their colorful blooms and variety of shape. They thrive in a dry, Mediterranean type climate; yet tolerate the extreme summer heat of the San Joaquin valley and the occasional mild winter freezes. They attract a variety of wildlife by providing shelter, seeds, and nectar.

Their most poignant quality is their striking floral display. The individual flowers are each quite small, yet are grouped into large, round or plume-like clusters, often covering the whole shrub. The flower colors vary from deep to pale blue, purple, lilac or white. They are usually quite fragrant, attracting bees for honey production; hummingbirds; as well as several types of butterflies. The eye-catching floral show can begin in late winter and extend into late spring.



Ceanothus prefers a slightly acidic soil, and most importantly, one which is well drained. They can endure summer sun, heat and even drought, once established. It is important to give them adequate water upon planting but be aware that overwatering in conjunction with heavier soils and poor drainage often leads to root rot. The ideal time to plant Ceanothus is late fall through early winter. This will allow winter rains to keep the soil moist and allow adequate deep root growth needed to sustain them in the summer. Watering the following summer should be infrequent, yet deep, allowing the soil to dry out before watering again. After the first summer, Ceanothus need very little or no water.

"California lilacs" are suitable for growing in a shrub border or against a sunny wall. Low growing or prostrate species are excellent as a groundcover, bank planting, or in a large rock garden. They provide great color contrasts with other complementary plantings. Manzanita, lupine, penstemon, toyon and rockrose show off and work well with Ceanothus. Most species are relatively fast growing and provide excellent color shows within one or two years. Their life expectancy in the landscape is sometimes only ten years, longer if grown like a native and not over-watered.

When planting Ceanothus in a newly established landscape be careful to allow adequate space for growth, especially horizontal. Once established they need little or no maintenance or pruning, infrequent to no watering, and are extremely resistant to disease or insect damage.

There are more than 40 species native to California. Here are three examples from a wide field of choice:

- "Concha" is a variety which grows 5-7 ft. high and 6-10 ft. wide. The long, dark green and glossy leaves are attractive enough alone, yet when matched with the stunning dark cobalt blue flowers; it is a virtual attention getter.
- "Yankee point," with a light to medium blue floral display, is a lower shrub, 2-3 ft. high and 10-12 ft. wide.
- "Ray Hartman" behaves like a small tree, reaching 15 ft. tall and 10-15 ft. across. Its large plumes of medium blue flowers are a showpiece in a much larger landscape setting.

So, if you're looking for a low maintenance shrub with low water requirements, yet provides high impact spring color, check out Ceanothus. The only problem you may encounter is choosing which few to select from the large number of beauties! Enjoy!

The Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at a few select locations in the next few months!

4/30/22, 10 am-2 pm -- Motors at Mission Oak Car Show, Mission Oak High School, Tulare

5/21/22, 10 am-3 pm -- GO Native!, Kaweah Oak Preserve, 29979 Road 182, Exeter

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Ace Hardware, Visalia - 1st Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm

Luis Nursery, Visalia - 2nd Sat./every month, 10 am-2 pm

Questions? Call us:

Call us: Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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