

## Shoal Creek Chaste Tree

Maureen Thiessen, Research Associate, LSU AgCenter, Hammond Research Station  
Jeb S. Fields, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, LSU AgCenter, Hammond Research Station  
Ashley Edwards, Research Associate, LSU AgCenter, Hammond Research Station

### *Vitex agnus-castus*

- **Recommended Use:** Large shrub or small multitrunked tree for the landscape and a pollinator attractor.
- **Exposure:** Full sun to part sun
- **Size:** 10-15 feet tall and wide
- **Habit:** Upright to spreading, multiple trunks
- **Bloom Time:** May/June, with second flush in August
- **Maintenance Category:** Low
- **Water Use:** Very drought tolerant
- **Highlights:** Vigorous growth, summer color, blue flowers, prospers in hot and dry environments, crape myrtle alternative, deer-resistant, attracts bees and butterflies.



Large, vibrant purple flower spikes appear in late spring to early summer.

### Summary

*Vitex agnus-castus* is native to southern Europe and western Asia and has been cultivated across the southern United States for nearly 400 years. Popular in older gardens, Vitex is a tough shrub or tree that can withstand a variety of conditions. While it prefers full sun and dry, sandy loam soil, Vitex can tolerate almost any site, provided it is well drained. Shoal Creek is noted for having more vigorous growth, larger flower spikes and resistance to leaf spot.

The large flower spikes appear around May to June, providing outstanding color to the landscape after most trees have completed their bloom cycle. The terminal positioning of the flower spikes, which can reach up 12 inches in length, makes them especially conspicuous. The gray-green foliage is beautiful and aromatic as well and appears in a palmately-compound arrangement. Furthermore, the large, fragrant, deep lavender blooms attract many pollinating species, including butterflies, bees and hummingbirds. A second pop of color can be enjoyed around August, provided gardeners deadhead spent blooms. The Shoal Creek vitex is a wonderful compact, summer-flowering tree that can brighten up any landscape. Moreover, it is a very common option for anyone looking for an alternative to crape myrtles. Occasionally subject to fungal and scale issues in particularly wet seasons, Shoal Creek is relatively free of pests, including deer. Vitex has a long history as a medicinal plant. The English name “chaste tree” and the common name “monk’s pepper” refer to beliefs that parts of the plant reduce libidinal desires. Early American physicians used it to stimulate lactation and as an emmenagogic.

Whether you want to increase the presence of pollinators in your backyard with a drought-tolerant, pest-resistant plant, or whether you want to try some ancient herbal remedies, this Louisiana Super Plant will make a statement in your garden. Shoal Creek is the premier variety of vitex and can be easily found in nurseries that sell trees and shrubs across the South.

### Requirements

- Preferring full sun exposure and dry sites, Vitex is very drought tolerant and can be planted anywhere other than heavy shade and soggy soils.
- Blooms more profusely under slight moisture stress.
- Optimal soil pH is between 6.0 and 6.5.
- Plant from fall to early spring.
- Fertilize in the late winter to avoid freeze risk to new growth.
- Vitex can be propagated by seeds, cuttings and layering.



*Blooms are fragrant and attract many pollinators.*



*Growers can prune Shoal Creek to a single trunk or enjoy its natural multitrunk habit.*

### Growth Habit

- Vitex is a deciduous plant bearing opposite palmately compound leaves in a very dense canopy, naturally reaching 10-15 feet in all directions.
- Its multitrunked habit can be pruned to a single tree form or selectively pruned to a small landscape tree or large shrub. Some even cut the plant back to the ground each year. Young plants grow very rapidly.
- Flower spikes appear above the foliage on new terminal growth in the late spring for a fantastic display of color.
- Dark-colored seed heads appear after bloom; deadheading these will encourage new terminal growth midsummer, leading to a second late-summer bloom.
- Shoal Creek is more vigorous and produces larger, 12-inch flower spikes that are a deeper blue color than the common vitex.

### Care and Maintenance

- Once established, vitex is very drought tolerant and fits in well to a lower-maintenance landscape. It prospers in hot and dry environments.
- Deer resistant.
- Vitex is relatively disease-free, although higher humidity in the southern portion of Louisiana can occasionally lead to *Cercospora*-induced leaf drop in the summer and scale.
- Vitex can be pruned to a standard but looks best when multitrunked.
- Pruning to maintain form and remove cold-damaged wood should be done in late winter.
- Thinning out old canes will also revitalize vitex.
- Deadheading of spent flowers can be done to improve appearance and encourage late summer re-bloom.

For more information on Shoal Creek vitex and other Louisiana Super Plants, contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office or visit [LSUAgCenter.com/SuperPlants](http://LSUAgCenter.com/SuperPlants).



Luke Laborde, Interim LSU Vice President for Agriculture  
Louisiana State University Agricultural Center  
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service  
LSU College of Agriculture

PUB. 3707-T (ONLINE) 10/21

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