Vitex agnus-castus ‘Silver Spire’
‘Silver Spire’ Chastetree

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

INTRODUCTION

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 white 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 sage-scented leaves of Chastetree are shaped liked a hand, or palmate, 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 agnus-castus ‘Silver Spire’
Pronunciation: VYE-tecks AG-nus-KASE-tus
Common name(s): ‘Silver Spire’ Chastetree, ‘Silver Spire’ Vitex
Family: Verbenaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 6B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; trainable as a standard; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 10 to 15 feet
Spread: 15 to 20 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: round; vase shape
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: palmately compound
Leaflet margin: entire
Leaflet shape: lanceolate
Leaflet venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous; fragrant
Leaflet blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: blue or blue-green; green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Figure 1. Mature ‘Silver Spire’ Chastetree.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Flower**

- **Flower color**: white
- **Flower characteristics**: pleasant fragrance; showy; spring flowering; summer flowering

**Fruit**

- **Fruit covering**: fleshy
- **Fruit color**: black
- **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; showy trunk; 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**: medium; thin

**Culture**

- **Light requirement**: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
- **Soil tolerances**: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- **Drought tolerance**: high
- **Aerosol salt 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**: long-term health usually not affected by pests
USE AND MANAGEMENT

Chastetree is used effectively in the mixed shrubbery 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 multistemmed shrub. Chastetree is a fast-grower and can easily recover its size when cold weather prunes it. Very similar to Vitex negundo, which also is called Chastetree, Vitex agnus-castus is not as cold hardy as Vitex negundo (grows in USDA hardiness zone 6a). Vitex agnus-castus may survive in USDA hardiness zone 6a if protected from winter winds.

Several other cultivars are available which offer flower color variety. ‘Alba’ has white flowers, and ‘Rosea’ has pink flowers.

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.