

***Prune Like a Pro:  
Chaste Tree (Vitex)  
2022***



**TITLE:** Prune Like a Pro: Chaste Tree

**Description:** Chase Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*) is a non-native shrub or tree which does best in hot weather. It is deciduous and drops its leaves each year. *Vitex* is resistant to damage by deer and is moderately salt tolerant. It has good drought tolerance once established. It freely reseeds and can become weedy. *Vitex*'s rapid growth rate can add up to 24" per year in height.

**Objective(s):** Learn how to prune your *Vitex* to the shape that you choose.

**WHAT:** In warmer climates, such as east TN, it can be trained grow as small, single trunk tree, multi-trunk tree or a large shrub. Although typically grown as a 10-15' tall and 10-15' wide shrub, in tree form, it can reach heights of up to 20'.

**WHY:** As noted, *Vitex*'s rapid growth rate can add up to 24" per year in height, so regular pruning will be necessary for the first few years until you achieve the shape that you want.

**WHEN:** *Vitex* blooms on new wood, so pruning should be done while the shrub is dormant in late winter to early spring. You can also prune (deadhead) faded flowers to promote continuous flowering.

**WHERE:** *Vitex* loves the heat, so do not plant this in a shady spot in your landscape.

**HOW:** Chaste Trees do not require pruning however respond very well to it.

- You can prune your Chaste Tree to control size or for shaping purposes, and also to encourage repeat flowering using a type of pruning called deadheading.
- Maintenance pruning
  - The 4 D's (dead, damaged, diseased, dysfunctional) should be removed when they occur.
  - Make your cut beyond the point of breakage or dead part.
- For controlling size or shaping
  - Extensive, heavy pruning to reduce the size of a chaste tree should be done in late winter before new growth has begun to emerge.
  - Cut branches to a desired length or to a point where they intersect another branch.
  - If you are just shortening a branch, cut just above a twig or bud.
  - If you are removing an entire branch, be sure to cut at the branch collar

## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Decide early on if you want to grow Chaste Tree (Vitex) as a shrub or as a small tree.
- As a shrub, plan to prune annually - Vitex is a fast-growing plant.
- As a single or multi-stem tree, the first few years will require close attention to identifying the best stems and removing all other stems.
- Regularly scout for, and remove, the 4 D's (dead, damaged, diseased, dysfunctional)
- Wear gloves: Vitex's juice or sap is an irritant that can cause painful blisters.



Grown as a shrub



Grown as a multi-stem tree

## Additional Resources / References:

"*Vitex agnus-castus*", NC State Extension, <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/vitex-agnus-castus/>

"*Texas Vitex*", Texas A&M Extension Master Gardeners,  
<https://dcmga.com/north-texas-gardening/perennials/master-gardener-favorites/texas-vitex/>

"How to Prune Chaste Tree, *Vitex agnus-castus*", Brad MacDonald, Surfing Hydrangea Nursery,  
<https://surfinghydrangea.com/how-to-prune-vitex-2308>

"How To Fertilize, Prune And Water A Vitex Chaste Tree", Wilson Bros. Gardens,  
<https://www.wilsonbrosgardens.com/how-to-grow-and-care-for-vitex-chaste-tree.html>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: [www.knoxcountymastergardener.org](http://www.knoxcountymastergardener.org)

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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