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Pollinator Friends

You can get a long bloom season out of ceanothus plants. The flowers attract swarms of beneficial pollinators.

Ceanothus species are a terrific addition for Oregon landscapes

Question: How can I improve my landscape to be more climate resilient and pollinator friendly?

Answer: Landscaping with native plants can help you make your landscape more climate resilient and pollinator friendly.

Native plants can be used around homes and in gardens to create sustainable landscapes. Pacific Northwest native plants can be used for a wide variety of landscape situations, including water-wise gardens and borders. Since native plants developed under our local conditions, they will thrive in our wet winters and have a natural tolerance for our hot-dry summer periods.

Plants native to the Pacific Northwest are some of the most attractive plants for gardens found anywhere in the world. They include plants of all statures, from towering trees to creeping groundcovers.



Chris Rusch
Master Gardener

Many of the flowering shrubs are excellent choices for garden borders and wildlife gardens.

An often-overlooked group of native shrubs is ceanothus. Ceanothus is a genus of about 50-60 species of nitrogen-fixing shrubs and small trees in the Rhamnaceae or buckthorn family. Common names for members of this genus are buckbrush, California lilac, snow brush or just ceanothus.

Ceanothus is native to the entire West Coast from Southern California up into British Columbia, as well as other parts of the U.S. The literature indicates that ceanothus affects many components of the forest ecosystem, including nitrogen availability, nutrient



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cycling, conifer establishment and growth, and forage quality for browsing animals.

Fire stimulates sprouting and seed germination of ceanothus, which assists in forest recovery after wildfires.

Ceanothus species demand a well-drained soil, so at planting

time add an organic material like compost to improve drainage. After that, no amendments or fertilizer are needed.

Ceanothus can handle full sun or partial shade. It is easy to grow in containers for transplanting. It can be propagated by cuttings or layering. There

are no real demands for heavy maintenance. Irrigation should be approximately once or twice a month.

You can easily prune as needed for restricting spread, but it is not necessary. The flowers are inconspicuous enough that they do not need to be dead-headed. There are few if any insect or disease problems.

Ceanothus thyrsiflorus, or blue blossoms, are by far the most common. One of the biggest attributes about ceanothus is that it's a reliable, bright, blue-flowered shrub. Getting blue into the landscape can be challenging. When ceanothus is in bloom, it's a solid glowing blue.

Flowers also show up in white and pink. Ceanothus plants start blooming early in April and continue until July, depending on the cultivar. Popular ceanothus cultivars include: 'Blue Jeans,' 'Marie Simon,' and 'Dark Star.'

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Another interesting ceanothus species is *Ceanothus prostratus* var. *occidentalis*, or prostrate ceanothus. This is a woody, evergreen groundcover. It is a great plant for dry shade or partial shade areas where it is also protected from excessive heat and wind. It forms a mat very close to the ground and is rarely more than a foot tall. The leaves are thick and oblong in shape and about 1 inch long and a half inch

wide. The margins of the leaves are toothed, but not sharp as to be injurious. The stems are distinctly prostrate, thus giving rise to the common name. In addition, they will root themselves where they touch the ground. This ground cover flowers in late spring to early summer and has small clusters of lavender blossoms that are uniquely attractive. The seed-pods are bright red. It is commonly found in round mats that are usually 8 feet in diameter or less. It is drought tolerant and attracts pollinators. It

is also a nitrogen-fixing plant. Another favorite cultivar for landscapes is *Ceanothus sanguineus*, also known as redstem ceanothus. *Sanguineus* means blood red, referring to the red stems. The creamy white flowers are fragrant and showy in the early summer and the reddish stems are attractive in the winter. Redstem ceanothus also can fix nitrogen so is good for areas with poor soils. Indigenous people used the dried leaves of ceanothus as an herbal tea, and early pioneers used the plant as a substitute

for black tea. Baskets were made from ceanothus branches. Hair and bath wash were made from the flowers. In summary, ceanothus species are tolerant of poor, dry soils. They're evergreen for the most part. You can get a long bloom season if you choose correctly. They have lovely flowers that attract swarms of beneficial insects, so the plant has ecological value. And now we know most of them are hardy here in the Pacific Northwest. They are truly extraordinary plants.

Be sure to register for the OSU Extension and Master Gardener Spring Into Gardening event scheduled for March 9. Visit bit.ly/33k1QGp for more information.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.