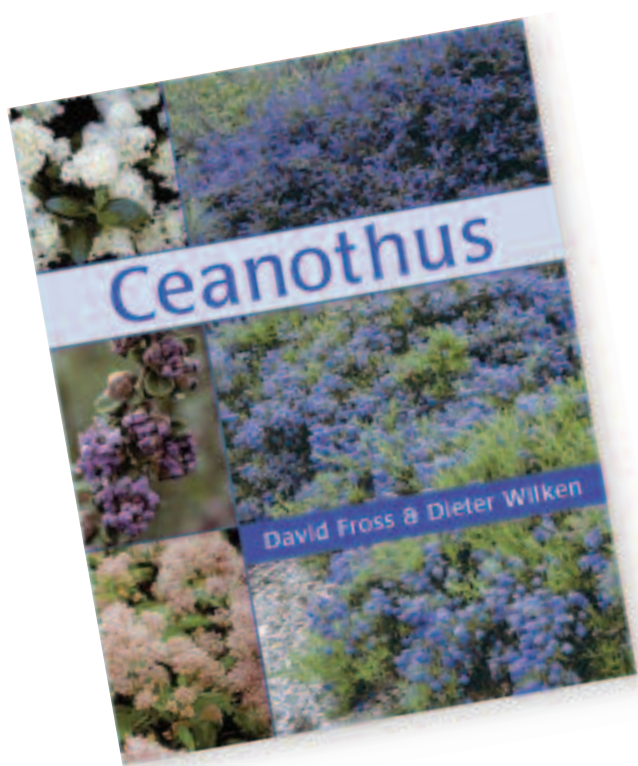


Ceanothus

David Fross and Dieter Wilken

Timber Press,
133 SW 2nd Avenue, Suite 450, Portland, Oregon 97204;
800.327.5680; URL: <http://www.timberpress.com>.
2006, hardcover, US\$ 39.95
(ISBN 0-88192-762-7),
272 p, 104 color photos, 50 line drawings
23 x 18 cm (7 x 9 in).



Ceanothus evidences the quality I have previously experienced in books published by Timber Press. The nature of the binding and presentation in the book is first-rate. Both authors are well versed in their fields. Both are excellent, competent botanists and know the horticultural applications of the genus firsthand.

The book comes in 2 parts, a format appropriately similar to the classic book *Ceanothus* published in 1942 by Maunsell Van Rensselaer and Howard McMinn. Part 1 deals with horticultural aspects of *Ceanothus*, and part 2 presents the wild or natural *Ceanothus* information. Thus, the book should be of interest to a diverse readership. Although many of the *Ceanothus* species are of most interest to those who live in the Mediterranean and modified Mediterranean climates in the western coastal regions of the US, there is ample information provided for the general reader.

Part 1 relates the interest over time that those involved in landscape design

and those who enjoy working in their yards have had in the glorious blossoms exhibited by the horticultural offerings provided by *Ceanothus* plants. The exquisite and varied colors of blues and associated colors are well illustrated and discussed here. The wealth of what is currently available and the suggestion of species yet available for future studies are presented. The ability to consider the information about horticultural *Ceanothus* offerings and compare that with the taxonomic information associated with the wild species is both interesting and valuable.

Experiential information in propagating, growing, and maintaining *Ceanothus* plants is included. This is extremely important in determining which entity is selected for a particular site and how it will be presented and maintained. The successful use of horticultural forms frequently depends on proper location and proper provision of water. The attractive illustrations greatly enhance this portion of the book. It is particu-

larly interesting to see how gardeners and landscapers in England, France, and the US have innovatively utilized *Ceanothus*. The book's selection guide presents suggestions for a number of differing sites—this plus some creativity will augment potential applications. While visiting some of the excellent gardens mentioned here, we could greater appreciate the plantings with this book in hand.

An examination of part 2, entitled "*Ceanothus* in the Wild," discloses a thorough review of pertinent literature. There is a functional glossary helpful to those of us who need a review of the botanical terminology and a useful dichotomous key to the species found in nature. The introductory portion of part 2 provides the paleo-history of the genus as well as the history of studies by the many eminent botanists who have dealt with this perplexing and taxonomically difficult group of plant species, which have been separated by physical terrains and the edaphic substrates in which they natively grow.

The species are visited by many pollinators and within a subgenus are subject to hybridization in their natural habitats. The reasons for such events are well presented.

Some *Ceanothus* species are nicely distinguished by morphological characteristics while other entities are so similar in appearance, but are separated by ecological constraints, that developing a functional identifying key is somewhat difficult. The key in part 2 appears to be effective in this task. The excellent drawings and images are valuable supplements to the descriptive words in the treatment.

At one extreme there may be some who would view the genus as possessing only 2 species instead of 2 subgenera. In this kind of treatment each of the species would be made up of extremely diverse subspecies and varieties. Others may prefer that every distinguishable entity be recognized taxonomically as a species, subspecies, or variety. Clearly there are grounds for taxonomic disagreement. It appears to me that the approach selected in this book is reasonable and functional. The inclusion of recent studies coupled with studies emphasizing entities south of the US border have added valuable taxonomic information. Also, the careful reconsideration of previous taxonomic treat-

ments by highly respected botanists of the past has modified and clarified the current *Ceanothus* treatment.

Dealing with the ecological roles of *Ceanothus*, I noticed discussion of nitrogen fixation by the actinomycete *Frankia* mentioned in part 2 and use of the general term “bacteria” in part 1, but I missed any mention of the roles of endomycorrhizae and ectomycorrhizae in the genus. I am under the impression that these fungi have significant roles in the genus. When I attempted to use the index to search for certain items I found the index somewhat restricted and lacking the item for which I was searching. Clearly the function of the index, however, is to easily direct one to the kinds of *Ceanothus* under consideration, and I found the parenthetical inclusion of the botanical name following the common name helpful. So, using the table of contents readily resolved my quibble.

That said, I will certainly show and commend this book to my colleagues, friends, and neighbors, and it will occupy an important place in my library, probably near other excellent books published by Timber Press. Further, based on personal experience, those who live in climates and places other than one possessing a Mediterranean climate

will surely benefit from this book. I have frequently been asked, by those who have encountered *Ceanothus* in their travels, what species could they grow where they live and where could they obtain it. This book will provide the proper responses.

—Clifford L Schmidt

Clifford L Schmidt is Emeritus Professor of Biology at San Jose State University and also a Courtesy Professor in the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology at Oregon State University. Following his completion of work on the ceanothus of California for The Jepson Manual, Higher Plants of California, he has now embarked on a taxonomic treatment of the same genus for a Flora of North America Project.