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A NEW GARDEN HYBRID IN CEANOOTHUS

LEE W. LENZ

One of the principal reasons why many of the choicer species of *Ceanothus* are not grown more extensively in gardens is the fact that many of them will not tolerate summer watering. In this respect *Ceanothus cyaneus* is the most notable example and while considered one of the finest of the so-called California Lilacs it is also one of the most difficult to maintain in situations where it receives any considerable amount of water during the summer. The intolerance of these plants to summer irrigation is to be expected since a great majority of the species come from areas which receive rainfall during the winter months and the plants then go into a period of aestivation during the long hot summers.

Several years ago in establishing a breeding program for the production of varieties of *Ceanothus* which could be successfully used in California gardens it appeared that the most important single objective would be the development of plants that would thrive under ordinary garden conditions of moisture. While the majority of the species in the genus are confined to California there are a few which occur elsewhere. Among the non-Californian species is the so-called New Jersey Tea, *Ceanothus americanus*, a plant which occurs in woods, on hillsides and in ravines from Maine to North Dakota, and southward to Florida and Texas. In Canada it is found from Ontario to Manitoba. Since much of this area is subject to summer rains it seemed that it might be possible to incorporate the genes for tolerance to summer watering into some of the more spectacular California species.

In the autumn of 1948 plants of *C. americanus* were obtained from Ohio and grown in large containers in the greenhouse. During the spring of 1949 a cross (No. 49-93) was made between *C. americanus* ♀ × *C. cyaneus* ♂. Because the individual flowers in *Ceanothus* are so small no attempt was made to emasculate them. It has been discovered since that *C. americanus* is self-incompatible and isolated plants do not set seed unless fertilized with pollen from another plant. Pollen of *cyaneus* was collected by tapping the inflorescence against a piece of paper and then gathering the pollen together with a small brush. This pollen was then dusted onto the flowers of *americanus*.

Only a very few seeds were harvested from the cross and these were planted in October, 1949. Of this lot only a single seed germinated and the resulting plant first bloomed in July, 1952.

In general the hybrid is rather intermediate between the parents:

	<i>C. americanus</i>	hybrid	<i>C. cyaneus</i>
Foliage	deciduous	deciduous to semi-deciduous	evergreen
Flower color	white	Gentian Blue*	deep bluish-purple
Flowering period	June-July	June-August (a few flowers over much of the year)	May-June (few flowers over much of the year)
Height	1½-3½'	5-6'	to 12'

*Horticultural Colour Chart 42/3.

Fig. 1. Upper left—*C. americanus*. Upper right—*C. cyaneus*. Lower—*C. americanus* $\times$ *C. cyaneus*.

Since 1952 this hybrid has been propagated by cuttings which appear to be somewhat easier to root than are the majority of the Californian species. Tests are now being conducted at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden to determine to what extent this hybrid can withstand ordinary garden care.

Horticulturally, the hybrid possesses several desirable characteristics. The blooming season reaches its peak sometime after the majority of the native species have finished flowering and it continues on well into the summer months, indeed a few flowers can usually be found on the plants even in late fall. At Claremont the original plant is growing on a rather windswept mesa which is subjected to a hot breeze nearly every afternoon during the summer months and under these circumstances the flowers do not last well. It would appear that, because of its summer blooming habit, the plants should be given a sheltered and perhaps semi-shaded position.

Due to the fact that the hybrid is deciduous, or nearly so, some gardeners would probably want to place it in a mixed planting where it would not be noticeable when it is bare. Another important characteristic of this hybrid is that it blooms on the current season's wood, thus the plant can be pruned during the winter and thereby kept to any desired size.

Ceanothus americanus has been used before in the production of hybrids but so far as is known this is the first time it has been crossed with one of the California species. According to historical records, *C. americanus* was introduced into England about 1713. During the early part of the nineteenth century a blue-flowered Mexican species, *C. coeruleus* (*C. azureus*) was introduced into France. From these two species a number of beautiful hybrids were produced in France and Belgium during the nineteenth century. Of the French hybrids, 'Gloire de Versailles' is undoubtedly the best known. Unfortunately this hybrid does not thrive well in southern California although it does well farther north. It is interesting to note that according to the Horticultural Colour Chart the present hybrid is nearly the same color as 'Gloire de Versailles' which is given as 'Lobelia Blue' 41/3, whereas the present plant is identified as 'Gentian Blue' 42/3.

Since this hybrid is being propagated and maintained as a clone, as well as being used for further breeding work, it seems best to give it a name at this time.

Ceanothus × *cyam* hybr. nov.

An erect much-branched deciduous or semi-deciduous shrub to 6' tall; bark on old branches grayish-brown, young branches greenish, pubescent; leaves alternate, ovate to narrow elliptic, rounded at the base, acute at the apex, 1.5-2.5 inches long, 0.75-1.25 inches broad, 3-nerved from the base, glabrous or nearly glabrous above, slightly pubescent beneath especially on the nerves, margins finely serrate to nearly entire; inflorescence a corymbose cluster of small panicles, flowers 'Gentian Blue' (H.C.C. 42/3). Flowering period June to August.

Hybrida interspecifica inter parentes *C. americanus* L. et *C. cyaneus* Eastw. plus minusve intermedia; frutex erectus, ramosus, deciduus; inflorescentia corymbosa panicularum pluralium parvarum; floribus caesiis.

Distribution: Hybrid of garden origin.