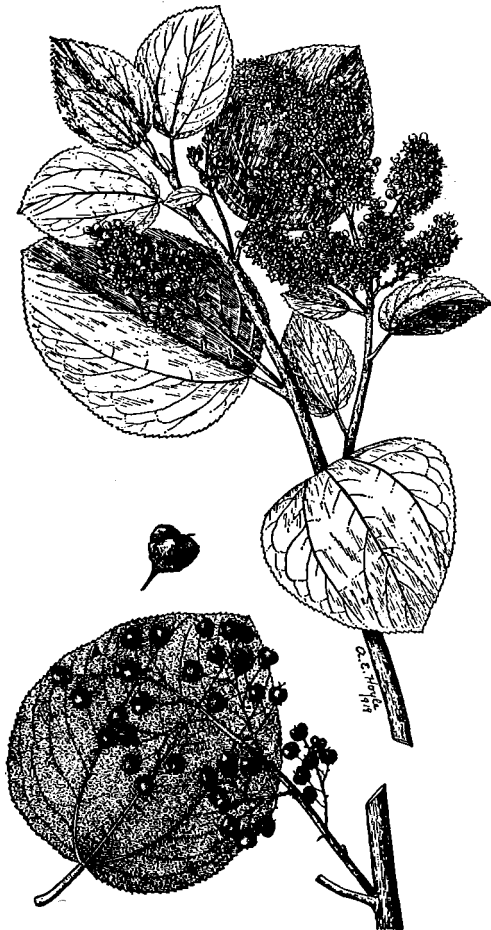


Snowbrush

(Ceanothus velutinus)

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Where does it grow? Snowbrush grows on various sites from British Columbia and Saskatchewan southward over most of western United States. In Oregon it ranges from the dry ponderosa pine areas of eastern Oregon to the wet coastal Douglas-fir areas. Snowbrush is best adapted to open, well-drained, cut-over and burned forest land. It is well adapted to burned areas because the seeds require a high temperature treatment before they will germinate. This characteristic enables the seed to remain dormant for more than a hundred years waiting for a forest fire. Snowbrush also sprouts vigorously from the root crown after burning.

Is it important? Snowbrush is a headache shrub to the forester. It may be a good nurse crop for Douglas fir. However, in the ponderosa pine areas it often forms dense thickets that prevent pine regeneration. Most Ceanothus species including C. velutinus have the ability to fix nitrogen by nitrogen-fixing nodules on the roots, thus increasing soil fertility. This may contribute to the establishment and growth of trees. Snowbrush is an excellent cover for deer. They frequently bed in snowbrush thickets and feed on the leaves.

What does it look like? Snowbrush is a shiny evergreen shrub about 3 to 7 feet tall. It has many stiff, spreading, green branches. The leaves are very thick and leathery. The leaves are sticky and stinky in the summer which give it the common name sticky laurel. The upper surface of the leaf is dark green and the lower surface is light green with short soft hairs. The hairs give rise to the specific name velutinus. The flowers of snowbrush are very white and clustered at the ends of the branches. The white flowers give the brush thickets the appearance of a light snow cover in the early fall.

Description:

Length of Life--Many years, or until the competition from trees crowd it out.

Height--Average from 3 to 5 feet, but may be from 2 to 10 feet tall.

Growth Period--It is green all year round, but stems put on growth only from the last heavy frost of spring to the first frost of fall.

How does it spread?--Entirely by seeds that must have a heat treatment before germination.

Shape of Leaves--Egg-shaped, three very distinct veins from the base (which is a good key to the Ceanothus genus), small serrations on the margin.

Other names--Mountain balsam, sticky laurel, tobaccobrush.

Stems--Varying shades of green.

How to use it--Snowbrush is not preferred by livestock and only moderately preferred by deer, thus it is rarely overused.

Does it look like anything else? Yes, it resembles several other species of Ceanothus. It can be differentiated by its alternate branching and thick, leathery, and sticky leaves. The distinct three veined leaves separate all species of Ceanothus from other shrubs.