Family: Rhamnaceae
Genus: Ceanothus
Common Name: California Lilac

Approximately 60 Species

Shrubs

From 1-6 feet high

e.g. ‘Joyce Coulter’

Small Trees

Up to 15-20 feet tall

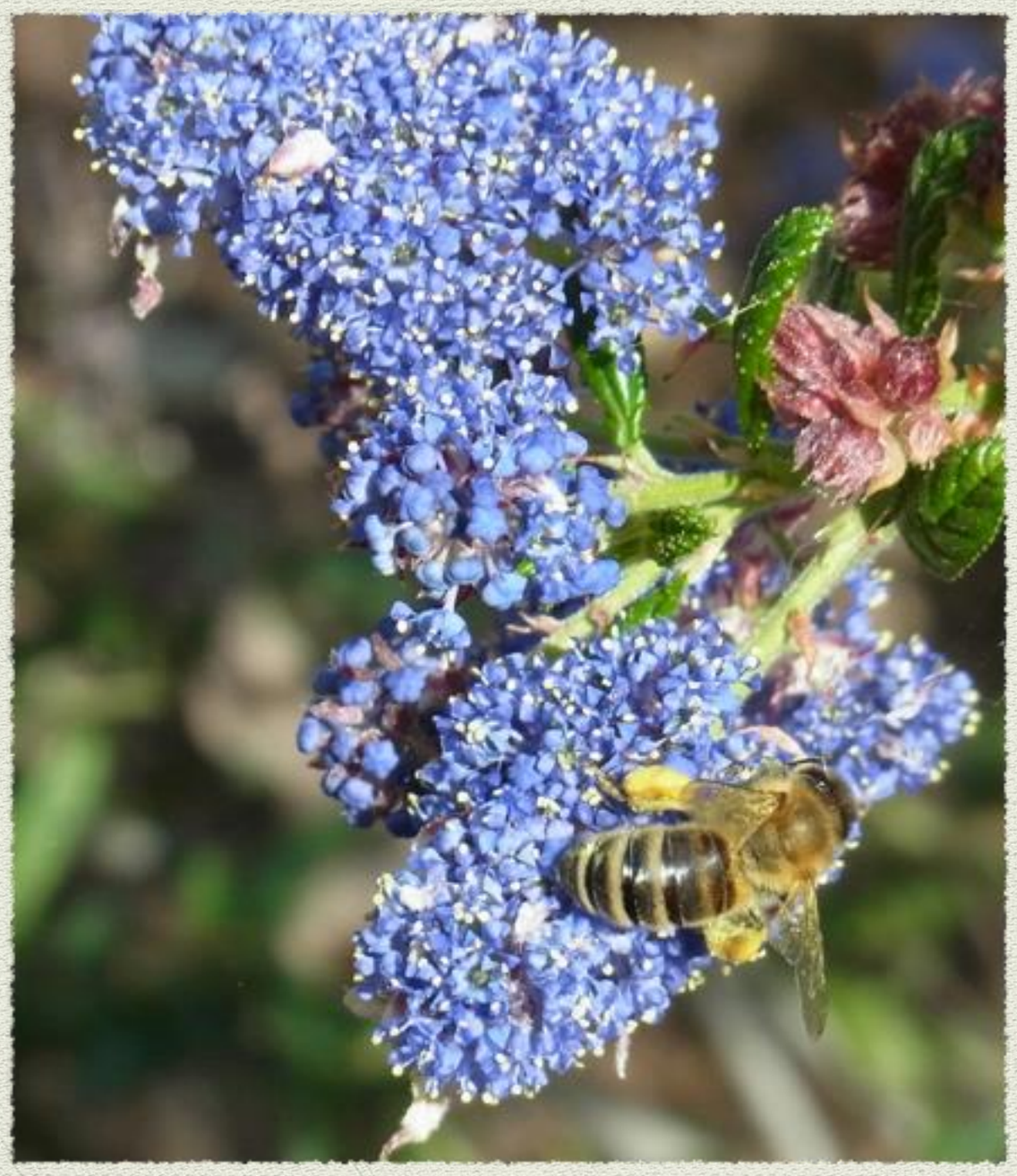
e.g.’Ray Hartman’

Leaves

- Unique leaf-vein structure
- 3 parallel veins
- Opposite or alternate
- Small, 1/2 “- 3”
- Serrated margins

Flowers

- Tiny, mostly blue, sometimes white or pink
- Intensely fragrant clusters
- March - May



Food plants for larvae of some butterfly and moth species - attract bees and other beneficial insects

Big-pod Ceanothus reproduces by stored seeds

- Cannot reproduce by re-sprouting after a fire – relies on seeds stored in the 'natural mulch' (duff) - ~ 2 million seeds/acre
- Seed pods burst open, flinging the heavy seeds
- Seeds have thick, tough seed coat – can lie in waiting for years (probably hundreds of years)
- Ceanothus seeds only germinate in response to range fires and forest fires in the wild.

Propagation = by seed - germinate in response to range/forest fires - can also sprout from roots and/or stems

History

Ceanothus - derived from Greek keanothos meaning “spiny plant”

Also Latin for “thistle”

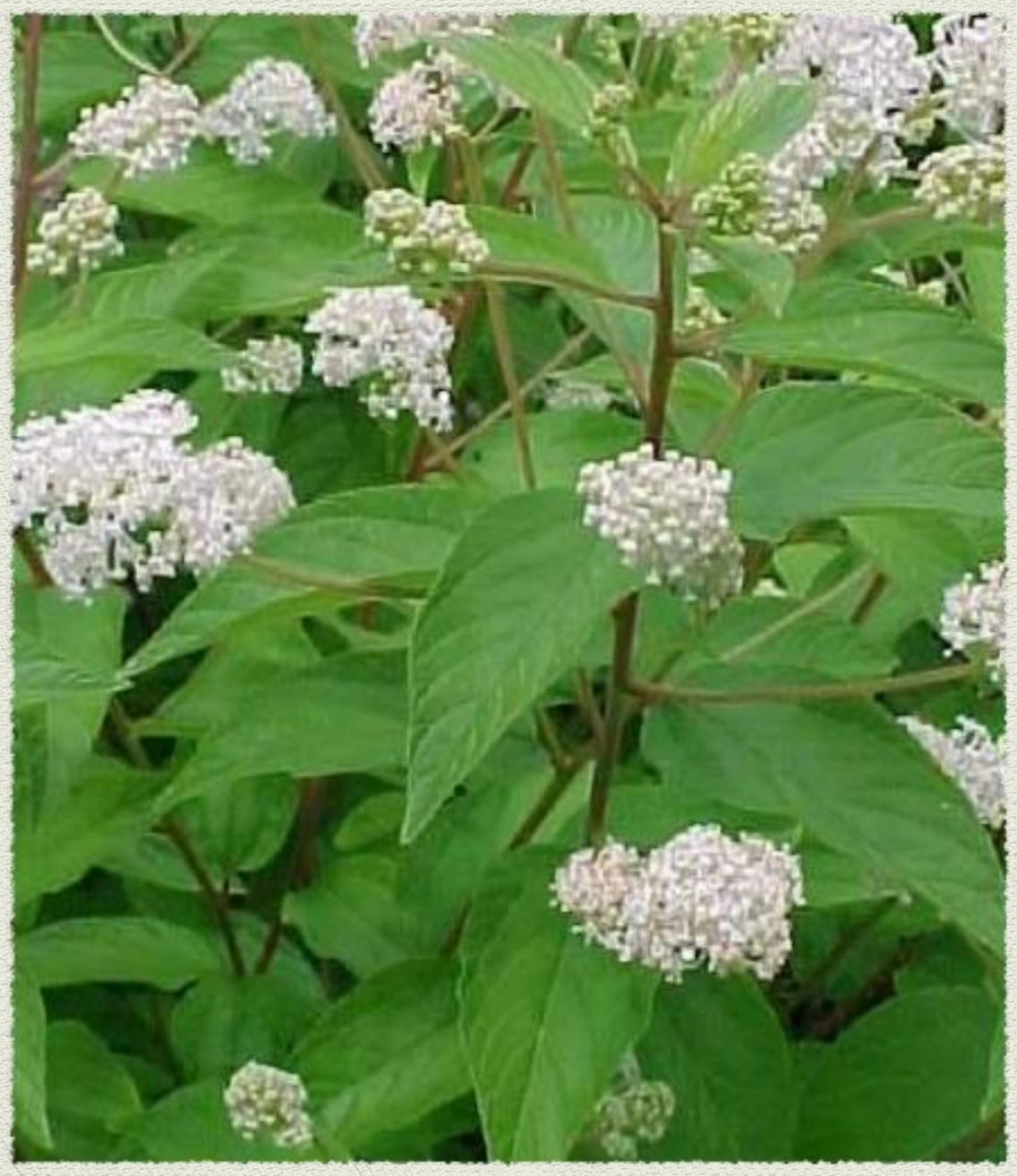
Ceanothus thyrisflorus - first California species introduced into European gardens (1837)

Ceanothus thyrisflorus
(blueblossom)

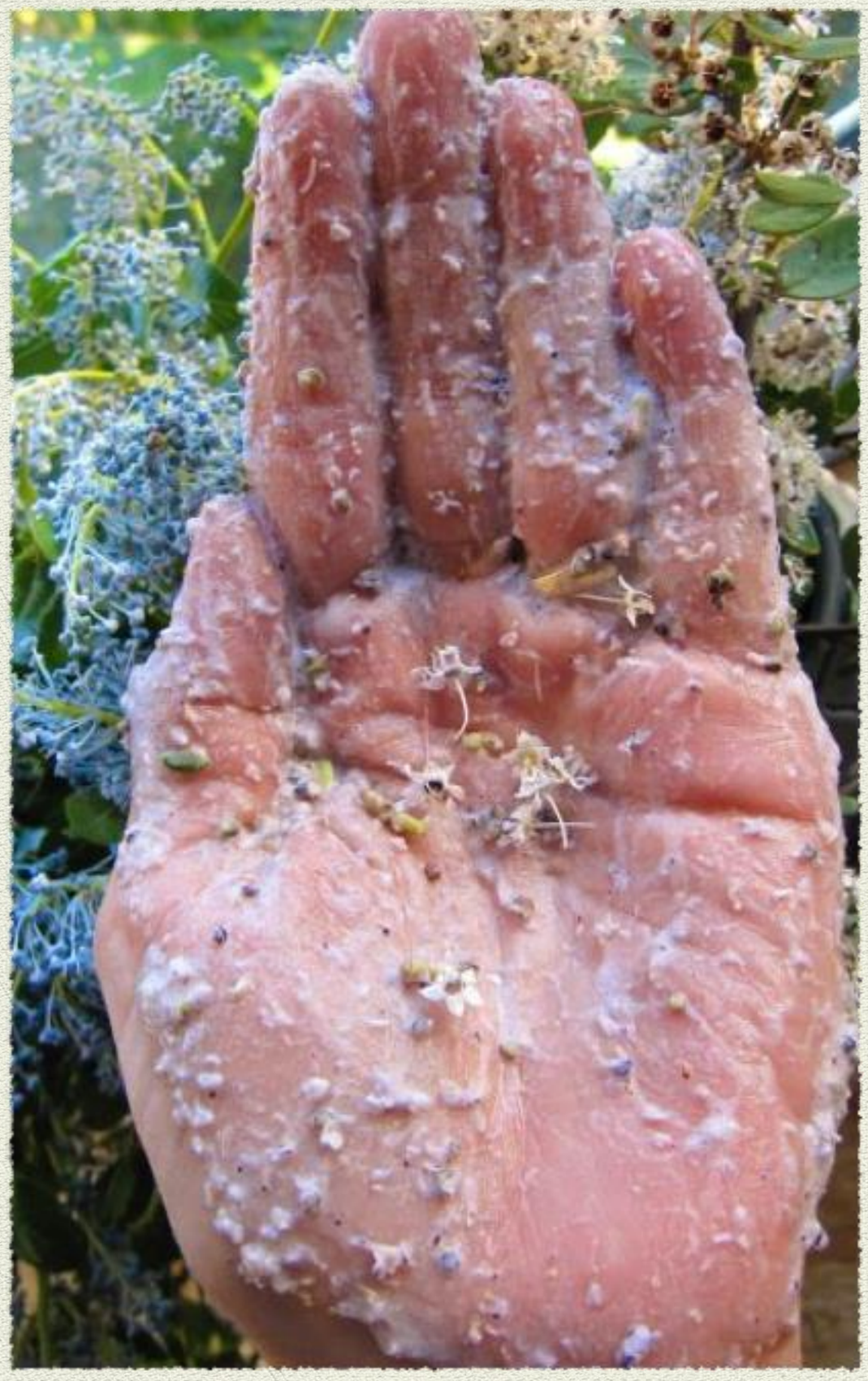
Traditional Uses

Native Americans used dried leaves as an herbal tea

Early pioneers used *C. americanus* as substitute for black tea (red root tea)



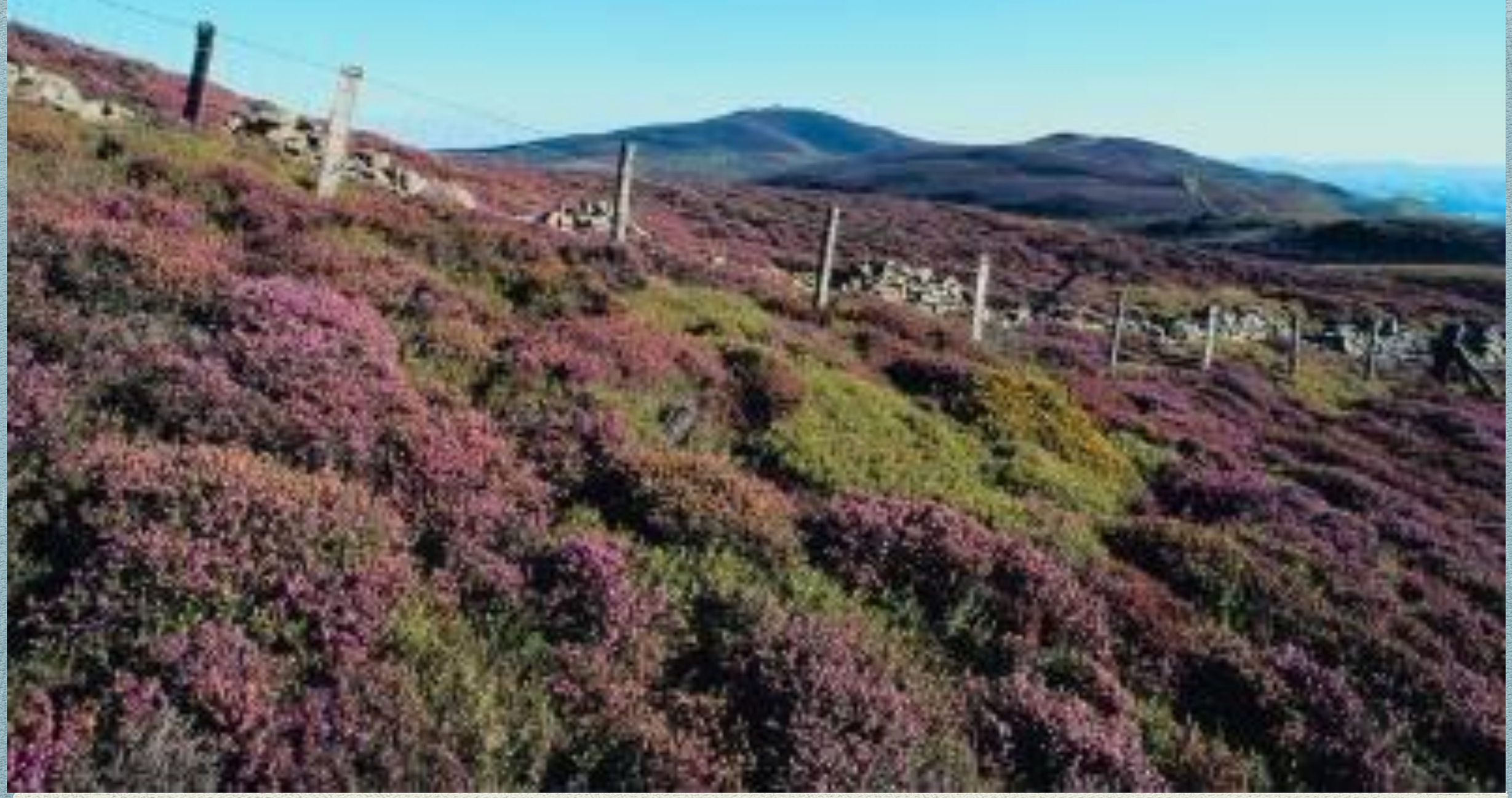
Lather from the flowers used as relief of poison oak, eczema, and rash



Native Americans used *C. Integerrimus* (deer brush) to ease childbirth

When to Plant

- Late fall through early winter to allow deep root growth with winter rains
- Water deeply and infrequently the following summer
- Once established, Ceanothus needs little or no water



Good drainage + full sun + less water = success!!

Natural life cycle of 10-15 years

Shape by tip pruning - like hungry deer in the wild (mmmm - my favorite!)

Ceanothus roots fix nitrogen in the soil
Fertilizing not recommended - might kill off good micro-organisms in the soil

Where to Plant

- Specimens
- Screens
- Hedges
- Groundcovers
- Next to a wall
- Shrub borders
- Near oak trees