

MOUNTAIN WHITETHORN

Ceanothus cordulatus Kellogg

Plant Symbol = CECO

Contributed by: USDA NRCS California State Office
and Lockeford Plant Materials Center, California



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Alternative Names

Snowbush

Uses

Mountain whitethorn can be used for ground cover on slopes, terraces or steep banks and as a barrier plant. Mountain whitethorn may be allowed to assume natural forms or may be shaped through pruning and pinching off the growing tips.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Buckthorn Family (Rhamnaceae). Mountain whitethorn is a densely branched, spiny, evergreen, flat-topped native shrub, which reaches heights of 2 to 5 feet. However, at elevations, such as the Lake Tahoe Basin, it assumes a low spreading growth form. Individual plants may spread to form continuous ground cover over areas with a diameter up to 12 feet. The numerous stems terminate in a hard sharp point thus, the name whitethorn.

Whitethorn flowers form in a small, dense cluster 1 to 2 inches long. The flowers, which bloom from late spring to mid summer, have a heavy penetrating fragrance. During the flowering season, the abundant white flowers may cause areas to appear covered with snow.

Distribution

California, Nevada, and Southwest Oregon. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Adaptation

Mountain whitethorn is well suited to dry open flats and rocky slopes with well-drained soils.

Seed Establishment, Production and Management

Mountain whitethorn seeds mature in late August and September. The seeds are contained within a triangular capsule. Collected capsules should be stored in paper bags and allowed to dry until they open and reveal the seeds.

The seed has a hard exterior coat and therefore a combination of soaking in hot water and cold storage pretreatments are necessary. Seeds should be placed in hot water, preheated to 180 degrees F., and then allowed to cool and soak for 24 hours. Following this hot water treatment, mix the seed with moist sand, place the mixture in plastic bags and store in the refrigerator.

Periodically check the bags for moisture and for swelling of the seed which indicates that they are close to germinating. Once the seeds have swollen, plant them in containers of potting soil and cover them with approximately ½ inch of soil.

After the plants have formed a third pair of leaves they can be transplanted individually to larger ½ to 1 gallon containers. The young plants will be ready for their permanent location in 1 ½ to 2 years. New plants should be watered occasionally until they are well established. Afterward, deep watering every 1 to 1 ½ months will be adequate to maintain uniform growth.

Container grown plants may be available from local nurseries. Dig a hole two to three times the diameter of the root ball and at least six inches deeper. Backfill the hole with six inches of native soil. Make

a few, 1/8 inch deep vertical cuts in the root ball, or carefully “tease” roots away from the root ball with your hands to encourage roots to grow into the new soil. Set the plant into the hole and fill in around the roots, firming the soil with your hands as you fill, until the hole is half full. Fill the hole with water and allow it to settle. This will settle the silt and eliminate air pockets around the roots.

Backfill with enough planting mix so the plant will set at the same level it was growing at in the container. Water to allow soil to settle, then add more soil if necessary. Build a berm of soil to form a watering basin around the outer edge of the hole. Break the basin down after two or three years.

Pests and Potential Problems

Fairly free from diseases, but is susceptible to crown and root problems related to agricultural soils and wet and poorly drained soils.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

‘Maleza’ Cultivar: This was released by the Lockeford, Plant Materials Center, Lockeford, California in 1989. Maleza mountain whitethorn is well suited for medium to coarse textured, well-drained soils. It is adapted to the Tahoe Basin, but grows well at elevations down to 3500 feet where precipitation is adequate.

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under “United States Government.” The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading “Department of Agriculture.”

References

USDA NRCS (Sept.) 1988. *Proposed Notice of Designation of Tested Germplasm of ‘Maleza’ Mountain Whitethorn for Conservation Use on Critically Eroded Areas in the Tahoe Basin and Surrounding Areas*. Lockeford Plant Materials Center, Lockeford, California.

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USDA NRCS. 2005. *The PLANTS database*. National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Accessed: 29MAR2005.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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