

NEW JERSEY TEA

Ceanothus americanus L.

Plant Symbol = CEAM

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Uses

Ethnobotanic: Tribes of the Missouri River region used the leaves for tea and burned the roots for fuel on buffalo hunting trips when fuel wood was scarce. The roots of New Jersey tea were used by the Chippewa for pulmonary troubles and for constipation coupled with shortness of breath and bloating. The Cherokee held the root tea on an aching tooth to ease the pain and consumed hot root tea for bowel troubles.

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

General: Buckthorn Family (Rhamnaceae). New Jersey tea is a native shrub ranging from 2-10 dm tall. The leaves are broadly oblong-ovate, 5-10 cm long by 2.5-6 cm wide. The leaves are wedge-shaped, tapering to a point at the base with a blunt tip. New Jersey tea has a branched, racemose inflorescence (1-4 cm long) with flowers maturing from the bottom upwards. The flower petals are dipper-shaped, 1-1.5 mm long, and white colored.

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat: New Jersey tea is usually found in the sandy soils of open woodlands and prairies, and on rocky hillsides.

Adaptation

New Jersey tea is fire-adapted. It is typically top-killed by fire, but is a prolific re-sprouter from the surviving rootstock. Where frequent fire occurs, New Jersey tea becomes a dominant species forming clusters among prairie grasses.

Establishment

New Jersey tea is a drought tolerant species that grows best in well-drained soils with full sun. New Jersey tea is difficult to transplant, therefore propagation by seed is recommended. Seeds should be planted outside in the late fall or early winter. To improve seed germination for spring planting the seeds should be submerged in hot water (180 deg. F) and allowed to soak overnight as the water cools then planted outside.

Pests and Potential Problems

New Jersey tea is susceptible to leaf spot and powdery mildew, however no serious insect or disease problems exist.

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

These materials are readily available from commercial plant sources. 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."

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Prepared By:

Matthew D. Hurteau

Formerly USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center, c/o Environmental Horticulture Department, University of California, Davis, California

Species Coordinator:

M. Kat Anderson

USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center, c/o Plant Science Department, University of California, Davis, California

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