

Friday, March 1, 2024

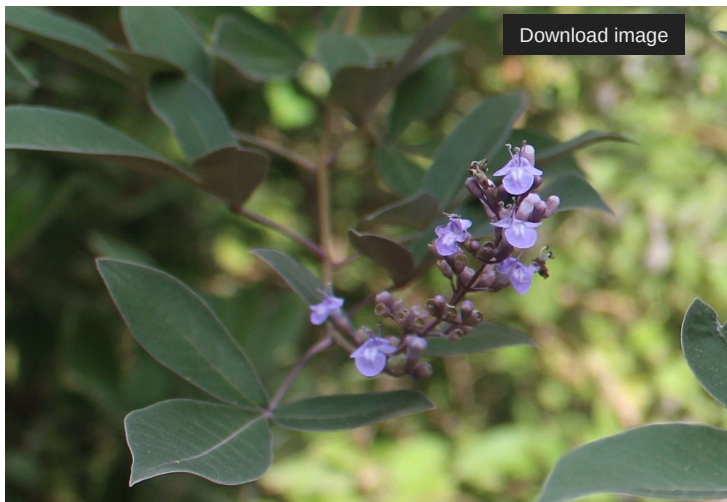
Vitex trifolia

Scientific name: *Vitex trifolia* L.

Family: *Lamiaceae*

Common name: Arabian Lilac, Hand of Mary, Simple-Leaf Chaste Tree

This lilac is a shrub with slender, highly branched stems, which can grow to a height of 5 or 6 metres. In our temperate climate, it is evergreen, but in colder climates it behaves as a deciduous plant, shedding its leaves in winter. Its natural range extends across tropical East Africa, temperate and tropical Asia, Australia, and the islands of Melanesia and Micronesia.



The flowers have a beautiful bilabiate corolla; they measure around one centimetre, are lavender-blue in colour with a white spot – sometimes pale and sometimes more intense – and are arranged in branched inflorescences up to 23 centimetres long. The fruits are ovoid, about 5 millimetres long; they start out reddish in colour and turn bluish-black. The leaves are ovate to lanceolate, with entire margins; they usually have three lobes, to which the species name refers, although in reality this number varies between 1 and 5. The entire plant is covered in a velvety tomentum, with greyish hairs on the young branches, the inflorescence stalk, the flowers, the fruits and the leaves, particularly on the underside. The genus name derives from a Latin word meaning ‘to tie’, referring to the fact that its slender, flexible branches were used to make baskets.

It flowers throughout the summer and into autumn. It is a hardy plant that tolerates pollution and coastal conditions well. In its native habitat, traditional medicine attributes medicinal properties to it, as it contains anti-inflammatory and analgesic compounds. Today it is widely grown as an ornamental plant. In La Concepción, it is planted along the Vuelta la Mundo, with 80 trees.