

Nature Notes

Ceanothus



Ceanothus (see-an-o-thus), or snowbrush, is a shrub that is commonly found in the open forest and dry rocky slopes of the KNP. The aromatic oval leaves are shiny on top and velvety below. This velvety feel is caused by tiny hairs that prevent excessive water loss.

The tiny white flowers form dense pyramidal clusters that bloom the end of May. These flowers are intensely fragrant, almost to the point of nauseating to some people. The smell has been described as "boiling honey in an enclosed area". Each flower produces a 3 seed lobed capsule that snaps open explosively to bury the heat resistant seeds in the duff. These seeds can remain dormant for over 200 years until stimulated by fire.



Photo L Grisedale

This shrub, which can vary between 2 to 6 feet tall, has many attributes. They are an important browse for deer. They are also nitrogen fixers absorbing nitrogen from the air, converting it to nodules on their roots that plants can use. The native people had many uses for ceanothus which included using the leaves for tea, making a decoction for eczema, burns, dandruff and arthritis. The wood was used to smoke deer meat.



Photo L Duncan

Next time you are walking on the Sunflower Hill trail keep an eye out for this interesting shrub.

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