

Ceanothus megacarpus Nutt. var. *megacarpus*, BIGPOD CEANOTHUS. Large shrub to multiple-stemmed small tree, evergreen, unarmed, much-branched with spreading to pendent stems, 120–500 cm tall; branches with long shoot-spur shoot design and having inflorescences arising from dormant tips of spur shoots; main trunk deeply fluted where old branches died and abscised; bark rough, \pm vertically fissured and \pm horizontally fractured into small, irregular plates, red-brown turning dull gray. **Stems:** \pm cylindrical, light greenish then brownish and finally aging grayish, canescent-strigose on young stems. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, petiolate, with stipules; stipules 2, on stem at node, domelike and corky typically with a short tip, stipules of opposite leaves not touching, 1.5–3 mm across, reddish to crimson becoming dark gray, canescent, persistent; petiole 2–4 mm long, canescent-strigose; blade narrowly heart-shaped or obovate to elliptic, 5–32 \times 7–16 mm, thick and stiff but not fibrous, broadly tapered at base, entire on margins or inrolled under (revolute) when water-stressed, truncate to shallowly notched (with short point) at tip, conspicuously pinnately veined and 1-veined from base with principal veins raised on lower surface, upper surface dark green, inconspicuously soft-hairy along midrib and margins soon becoming glabrescent, lower surface canescent with inconspicuous indentations (= stomatal crypts). **Inflorescence:** racemelike, axillary on spur shoot or several spur shoots + inflorescences clustered at ends of long shoots forming larger displays, in showy clusters 12–18 \times 15–20 mm, 6–20-flowered, lateral branchlets (cymes) alternate along axis and 1–3-flowered, bracteate, densely puberulent; spur shoot 1–6 mm long, of 1 internode, with 2 leaves and their associated paired stipules subtending inflorescence, densely puberulent; peduncle $<$ 2 mm long or absent; bract subtending cyme at node, ovate to round and strongly cupped, \pm 2 mm long, often reddish above midpoint, puberulent on all surfaces, early-deciduous; bractlet subtending pedicel like bract, narrowly lanceolate, early-deciduous; pedicel slender, 3–10(–14) mm long increasing in fruit, greenish in bud and becoming white to pink or purplish pink, flexible, glabrous. **Flower:** bisexual, radial, 5–6 mm across, glabrous; hypanthium subtending fleshy disc below ovary base, greenish or colored like pedicel but darker; **sepals** 5(–6), spreading and somewhat incurved, ovate-deltate, 2–2.5 mm long, with midridge on upper surface, white sometimes with lavender or pale violet (rarely in range entirely pale violet); **petals** 5(–6), narrowly clawed and conspicuously hooded, 2.5–3(–3.5) mm long, initially elevated and often twisted, same color as sepals; **stamens** 5(–6), free, opposite petals; filaments \pm 2.5 mm long, white or whitish with tinge of violet at base, arching inward and often approaching stigmas; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, 0.8–1.2 mm long, initially enveloped by hood of petal, dehiscing in bud, light yellow, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **nectary disc** flattened ringlike and weakly scalloped, 0.3–0.5 mm thick, 1.2–1.5 mm in diameter, dark to light purple; **pistil** 1, 1.5–2.3 mm long; ovary superior, triangular in \times -section, 3(–4)-lobed with incipient horns, dark purple or green, 3(–4)-chambered, each chamber with 1 ovule; style \pm 0.8 mm long, dark violet to purple, 3-branched in upper 1/3, cylindrical at anthesis with appressed lobes, increasing length and lobes spreading after anthers discharge pollen; stigma darker than style. **Fruit:** schizocarpic capsule, at maturity separating into 3 1-seeded parts with rounded bases from persistent disc, 7.5–10(–12) mm wide, when immature green with red becoming brownish before dehiscence, 3-lobed with a hornlike projection (crest) on tip of each valve that shrivels at dehiscence,

glabrous. **Seed:** ± spheric or obovoid, ca. 3.5–4 × 3–3.5 mm, compressed top-to-bottom, brown, smooth. Mid-November–early March (mid-June).

Native. Shrub common in range and dominating several phases of chaparral, where it can form nearly pure stands by regenerating from seeds following a fire. Of our three *Ceanothus* species having tough, evergreen leaves (subgenus *Cerastes*), only *C. megacarpus* has alternate leaf arrangement, so this species is always easy to identify. This species has buds of its inflorescences already preformed in summer, and in most years this is the first species of *Ceanothus* to bloom, and is one of a few native shrub species to be in flower during December. In some years, flowering at lower elevations tends to be completed before March, but at higher elevations it blooms later and overlaps broadly with the other species of *Ceanothus*. In an unusual El Niño year, a rare population was found with a branch of flowers as late as June 17, presumably because some individuals flowered a second time. The standard flower is white, but individuals with pale violet flowers can be found, especially on south-facing slopes along Schueren Road, or when shrubs flower late in the spring. Bigpod ceanothus refers to this being the largest fruited species in southern California. Like other species in the subgenus, the immature fruit bears 3 horns, and fruits begin to “explode” in the summer heat of late June to disperse their seeds.

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