



Japanese Spiraea

Spiraea japonica L. f.

Rose family (Rosaceae)

NATIVE RANGE

Japan, Korea and China

DESCRIPTION

Japanese spiraea, also called Japanese meadowsweet, is a perennial, deciduous shrub that grows to 4 or sometimes 6 feet in height and about the same in width. It has slender erect stems that are brown to reddish-brown, round in cross-section and sometimes hairy. The leaves are generally egg-shaped, 1-3 inches long, have toothed margins and alternate along the stem. Clusters of attractive, rosy-pink flowers are borne at the tips of branches.

Seeds, measuring about 1/10 inch in length, are contained in small lustrous capsules. Japanese spiraea is naturally variable in form and there are many varieties of it in the horticultural trade.



ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Japanese spiraea can rapidly take over disturbed areas. Growing populations creep into meadows, forest openings, and other sites. Once established, spiraea grows rapidly and forms dense stands that outcompete much of the existing native herbs and shrubs. Seeds of Japanese spiraea last for many years in the soil, making its control and the restoration of native vegetation especially difficult.



DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Japanese spiraea is now naturalized throughout much of the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest.

HABITAT IN THE UNITED STATES

Japanese spiraea is adapted to disturbed areas, tolerates a wide range of soil conditions and grows in full sun to partial shade. It is commonly found growing along streams and rivers, forest edges, roadsides, and in successional fields and power line right-of-ways.

BACKGROUND

Japanese spiraea was introduced into the United States as an ornamental landscape plant and first cultivated in the northeastern states around 1870.

BIOLOGY & SPREAD

A single Japanese spiraea plant produces hundreds of small seeds that are naturally dispersed by water and deposited along stream banks. Seeds may also be carried in fill dirt and establish new populations in the highly disturbed soil of construction sites.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Cutting or mowing Japanese spiraea shrubs may be effective for small, initial populations or for environmentally sensitive areas where herbicides cannot be used. Repeated mowing or cutting will control the spread of spiraea, but will probably not eradicate it.

Spiraea resprouts after cutting, making repeated cutting necessary to exhaust the plants energy reserves. Stems should be cut at least once per growing season, prior to seed production, and cut as close to ground level as possible.

Chemical: Foliar herbicide applications should be considered for large thickets of Japanese spiraea where the risk to non-target plants is determined to be minimal. Applications may be made almost any time of year, as long as the air temperature is above 65°F, to ensure absorption of the chemical by the plant. Apply a 2% solution of glyphosate (e.g., Roundup® or Rodeo®) or triclopyr (Garlon®) and water plus a 0.5% non-ionic surfactant to thoroughly wet all leaves. Use low pressure and a coarse spray pattern to reduce spray-drift to non-target species.

NOTE: Glyphosate is a non-selective systemic herbicide that may kill even partially sprayed plants. Triclopyr is a selective for broadleaf species. In areas where desirable grasses are growing under or around spiraea, triclopyr can be used without damage to the grasses.

USE PESTICIDES WISELY: Always read the entire pesticide label carefully, follow all mixing and application instructions and wear all recommended personal protective gear and clothing. Contact your state department of agriculture for any additional pesticide use requirements, restrictions or recommendations.

NOTICE: mention of pesticide products on this page does not constitute endorsement of any material.

CONTACT

For more information on the management of Japanese spiraea, please contact:

- Kris Johnson, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg, TN

SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVE PLANTS

Some suitable native alternatives for Japanese spiraea include shrubs like sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*), arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), Summersweet clethra (*Clethra alnifolia*), Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*), inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), pinxterbloom azalea (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*), and sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginica*). You may wish to contact the native plant society in your state for more assistance.

OTHER LINKS

- <http://www.invasive.org/search/action.cfm?q=Spiraea%20japonica>

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