

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Japanese Spiraea

*Spiraea japonica*



Leslie J. Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Background:

Japanese spiraea was introduced into the United States as an ornamental plant in 1870. Naturally variable in form, many varieties are still available in the horticultural trade.

### Range:

Native to Japan, Korea and China, Japanese spiraea is now naturalized throughout much of the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest regions of the United States.

### Description:

Japanese spiraea is a deciduous shrub that reaches four to six feet in height. Its slender, erect stems bear alternate, ovate leaves with toothed margins. Clusters of rosy-pink flowers are borne at the tips of branches. The tiny seeds are contained in small, lustrous capsules.



James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Habitat:

This shrub prefers full sun to partial shade, and is adaptable to a wide range of soil conditions. It is commonly found in disturbed areas, such as along streams and rivers, forest edges, roadsides, successional fields and power line rights-of-way.

### Biology and Spread:

A single plant produces hundreds of small seeds that are dispersed by water and deposited along stream banks. Seeds can also contaminate fill dirt, establishing new populations at construction sites.

### Ecological Threat:

Japanese spiraea grows rapidly and can quickly take over disturbed areas. Forming dense stands, it can out-compete much of the native vegetation. This shrub also establishes a seed bank that lasts many years in the soil, making future restoration efforts difficult.



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## How to Control this Species:

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### Physical

Seedlings may be pulled by hand, especially when the soil is moist.

Cutting or mowing may be effective in controlling small populations, but may not result in complete eradication.

To prevent re-sprouting, repeated cutting is necessary to exhaust the plant's energy reserves. Stems should be cut at least once per growing season, prior to seed production, and as close to the ground as possible.

### Chemical

Foliar herbicide applications of glyphosate or triclopyr should be considered for large thickets where the risk to non-target plants is minimal.

These herbicides may also be applied to recently cut stumps to destroy the root system.

## For More Information:

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DCNR Invasive Species Site:

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

DCNR Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers:

[http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/japanese\\_spiraea.htm](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/japanese_spiraea.htm)

## Look-A-Likes:

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Japanese spiraea may be confused with other related species, including our native spiraeas, such as steeplebush (*Spiraea tomentosa*).



Steeplebush  
Stefan Bloodworth  
[www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)

## Native Alternatives:

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Native shrubs such as arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), native azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.), and native spiraeas (*Spiraea* spp.) are good alternatives.



Arrowwood  
Vern Wilkins  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)



Pinxterbloom Azalea  
William M. Ciesla, FHM  
International  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## References:

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Global Invasive Species Database: <http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?fr=1&tsi=622&sts=>

Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group:  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/spja1.htm>

