

**Japanese Meadowsweet**                      **SPJA**

***Spiraea japonica*** L. f.

Synonyms: Japanese spiraea, maybush

**From:** Miller, James H. and Steve T. Manning. [working title] An Expanded Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. DRAFT - August 2008

**Family: Rosaceae**

**Plant.** Deciduous, erect shrub to 6 feet (1.8 m) high with multiple stems and alternate branches, slender and brown, intertwining within older shaded plants or arching outward on hill side infestations. Small, alternate lanceolate leaves with irregular serrate margins and flat-topped clusters of tiny, rose-pink flower heads, festooning branch tips that turn into crowded clusters of lustrous brown seed capsules in mid-summer. Plant traits are variable due to numerous escaped cultivars.

**Stem.** Twigs initially whitish-green, slender and wiry, usually quite hairy, jutting upward, often terminated in flower or fruit clusters. Stems becoming brown to reddish brown, round in cross section, with increasing lengthwise grayish to whitish stripes of dotted cork and protruding circular leaf and branch scars with surrounding corky deposits. Multiple basal sprouts on older plants intertwine for support.

**Leaves.** Alternate, thin, elliptic to lanceolate, 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.6 cm) long and less than half as wide, tips are pointed and bases wedge shaped, margins irregularly and sharply serrated and less so towards the base. Blue green to green above and lighter beneath. A short petiole connects to a pronounced whitish-green midvein with about 10 lateral, curved veins that end at serrate tips and are hairy beneath.

**Flowers.** June to September. Terminal on new growth, multi-branched, flat-topped clusters (corymbs) of many red to rosy, domed flower buds that open into tiny, whitish-pink to rose (rarely white) flowers, 0.2 inches (5 mm) wide with 5 petals and an extended mist of anthers. Sepals and stalks hairy.

**Fruit and seeds.** July to November. Tiny star clusters of five tan to brown capsules, smooth and lustrous, that split on top at varying times to release one minute golden seed, 0.09 to 0.1 inch (2 to 2.4 mm) long.

**Ecology.** Forms dense infestations of entangled stems and branches and produces abundant foliage to exclude other plants and impact animal habitat. Seeds are dispersed by gravity, water, and soil movement during road maintenance. Populations occur along streams, roads, and adjacent disturbed sites and move into forest understories. Infestations intensify by abundant basal sprouting. Tolerant to a wide variety of growing conditions and can occur in forest gaps and understories.

**Resembles** several native and nonnative spiraeas, but is unique by the flat-topped, pink to pink-rose flower clusters and brown fruit clusters, the hairy branchlets and flowers, and lanceolate leaves. It is the species most often found growing in dense infestations. The other nonnative spiraea species have yet to become so problematic.

**History and use.** Introduced from Japan, Korea, and China. as an ornamental about 1870. Several cultivars still sold and planted by unsuspecting gardeners.