

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Beefsteak Plant

*Perilla frutescens*



Jil Swearingen, National Park Service  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Background:

Beefsteak plant was introduced into the United States as an ornamental, culinary herb and salad plant by Asian immigrants in the late 1800s. It is a traditional crop of China, India, Japan, Korea, Thailand and other Asian countries.

### Range:

Native to Asia, beefsteak plant can now be found throughout much of the eastern half of the United States.

### Description:

Beefsteak plant is a freely branching herb that may reach a couple feet in height. Its serrated, ovate leaves are generally purple or green. Between July and October, auxiliary and terminal clusters of white and purple bell-shaped flowers appear, each flower with distinctive fine hairs at the base. Stems and leaves have a strong odor that is reminiscent of basil and coleus or raw beef.



Marisa Williams, University of Arkansas  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

### Habitat:

This plant can be found along roadsides, railroad rights-of-way, riparian zones along streams and rivers, pastures, fields, woodlands and gravel bars. It prefers rich soil in full sun, but can handle drier locations.

### Biology and Spread:

Beefsteak plant is reported to be extremely invasive by wind-borne seeds.

### Ecological Threat:

Beefsteak plant readily escapes cultivation into nearby natural areas where it can disrupt ecosystems, pushing out the native vegetation. Disturbed sites are especially prone to invasion. Avoided by cattle, this species is toxic to livestock and other herbivores.



John D. Byrd, Mississippi State University  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## How to Control this Species:

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### Physical

To prevent the spread of this species, deadhead spent flowers, or cut off seeds or fruits before they ripen.

Seedlings and shallow-rooted plants can be pulled when the soil is moist. Dig out larger plants, including the root system.

Plants grown for culinary use should be watched closely and prevented from going to seed. Try growing indoors or in a greenhouse.

### Look-A-Likes:

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Beefsteak-plant could be confused with other mints, as well as members of the nettle family (Urticaceae) such as wood nettle (*Laportea canadensis*).



George H. Brusco  
[www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)

### Chemical

Beefsteak plant can be effectively controlled by general herbicides such as glyphosate.



Jerry A. Payne, USDA ARS  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## Native Alternatives:

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Try other members of the mint family (Lamiaceae) such as bee balm (*Monarda* sp.), mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum* sp.) or horse-balm (*Collinsonia canadensis*).



James H. Miller & Ted Bodner, SWSS  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## References:

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National Park Service:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/pefr.htm>

USDA Forest Service: [http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive\\_plants/weeds/beefsteak-plant.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/beefsteak-plant.pdf)

## 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/beefsteak\\_plant.htm](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/beefsteak_plant.htm)

US Forest Service Invasive Plants Field Guide: [http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf)