

Weed focus: Pennsylvania smartweed

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Pennsylvania smartweed (*Polygonum pensylvanicum* L.) is one of about 75 smartweeds that can be found in the USA. They are native to North America and are identified by their spikes of numerous flowers and encircling leaf sheaths (photo at right). Pennsylvania smartweed is a cool-season, annual and is in the buckwheat family. Plants grow mostly in moist, disturbed areas such as near ponds, in drainage ditches, and along wooded areas. When found near bodies of water, smartweed is an important food and shelter source for waterfowl. Seeds and other plant parts are also consumed by other birds, muskrats, raccoons, and fox squirrels, so this plant promotes wildlife diversity.

The smartweed plant may be erect or spreading (below, left). When spreading, the plant is able to root at its growth nodes. It has a taproot that may grow 8 inches down into the soil. A fully grown plant can reach 1 ft tall and spread to 4 ft. diameter. Leaves may be solid or have a dark mottling (below, right). They are 3 to 6 inches long, $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ in wide, and lanceolate. Flowers are white to pink and appear on spikes at the tip of stems. They are present from May through October. Spikes are generally about 2 inches long (top, right).



Pennsylvania smartweed is edible; however, its taste may be strong and unappealing. It has several uses among Native American tribes, mostly related to stopping hemorrhage. It has no known toxicity to livestock.

Controlling Pennsylvania smartweed in pastures: Because this plant likes very moist environments, it is often not a problem in open pastures. Promoting thick cover and good drainage will prevent this plant from becoming established. Seedlings do not tolerate disturbance so trampling by livestock can help eliminate them. If herbicide becomes necessary, products containing dicamba are the most effective. Application should be made while the plant is actively growing and before seed is set. Read and follow labeling, especially in regard to application around surface waters.

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