

Bouncing Bet

Bouncing Bet (*Saponaria officinalis*) is also known as soapwort or bruisewort. It is a native plant of Europe but has naturalized over most of North America.

Bouncing Bet can be found growing along roads, in waste grounds, on gravel and sand bars, along streams and along railway tracks.

Culture

Bouncing bet grows in zones 3 to 8 as an herbaceous perennial. It grows 1 to 2 feet tall, including a long flower stem, and 1 to 1½ feet wide.

The plant tends to spread vigorously in good soil conditions. Although it prefers to grow in average, dry to medium, well-drained soil in full sun, it will grow in poor, sandy soils; it tends to flop in fertile soil.

Bouncing Bet has a phlox-like bloom from July to September. The many flowers are large, flesh colored or pale pink, and often double. To prolong blooming, spent blooms should be removed frequently. Bouncing Bet flowers have a sweet fragrance and attract butterflies to a garden. The leaves are lanceolate and smooth.

Landscape Value

Bouncing Bet spreads by rhizomes and can become an invasive species if it's not well maintained. This plant should be grown in an area in which nothing else will grow or in a naturalized landscape. Some cultivars

(for example, 'Flore Pleno') are less vigorous and can be used in a perennial bed.

Propagation

Propagation by division or root cuttings can be done during any season. Seeds can also be taken, but they need to be cold stratified before planting.

At the end of the season, Bouncing Bet should be mown with a lawn mower.

Other Uses

In the past, Bouncing Bet was used as a soap alternative, hence the name soapwort. When the leaves and roots are crushed and mixed with water or alcohol, a rich lather is formed. Native Americans used this for many ailments such as rashes and gonorrhea.

The plant was never ingested because of the damage it does to the inside of stomach and intestinal walls. Scientists are researching this plant for other benefits.

This plant contains saponin, which is a toxic chemical. Humans don't absorb it into the body very well, but it's unlikely to cause harm unless it is consumed in high quantities. Bouncing Bet should not be planted near a stream or pond that contains fish because the saponins are fatal to them.

Bouncing Bet does not have any pest or disease problems and will deter deer.

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