

Bouncingbet

Saponaria officinalis L.

Synonyms

Lychnis saponaria Jessen

Description

Bouncingbet is an herbaceous perennial plant that grows 12–35 inches high and produces strong runners. Stems are straight and stiff. Plants are hairless or have few small hairs. Leaves are ovate and entire with 3 prominent veins. Flowers are white to pink and about 1¼ inches across.

Similar Species

Bouncingbet is unique among Alaskan Caryophyllaceae in having sepals connate for half their length and only 2 stigmas, rather than 3–5 as in *Silene* and *Lychnis* species. It has broader leaves than the native boreal carnation (*Dianthus repens* Willd.), a rare plant in the North American arctic.

Ecological Impact

Bouncingbet can form very large populations and dominate plant communities. Roots and seeds are slightly poisonous to humans and animals (Russell 1997), and animals typically avoid eating this plant.

Biology and Invasive Potential

Bouncingbet has high fruit and seed abundance and moderate vegetative spread capability (OPBWG 2004). It produces an average of 50 seeds per fruit and 30 fruits per plant for a potential of 1,500 seeds per plant. It can



XID Services photo by Richard Old

resprout when cut or grazed. Hay and other feeds can be contaminated by its seeds or other plants parts, and it can also be a component in wild-flower seed mixes. Bouncingbet is adapted to pH levels ranging from 5.0 to 7.0 and coarse and medium textured soils. It is intolerant of saline soils, and no cold-stratification is required. It is highly drought- and fire-tolerant, withstands temperatures to -18°F , and requires 130 frost-free days for reproduction (GRIN 2004). It is listed as a noxious weed in Colorado, an exotic pest in California, and a weed in Kentucky.



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Distribution and Abundance

Bouncingbet has been planted along roadsides in south-central Alaska and has spread into waste areas. The species is native to central and southern Europe but has spread throughout western and northern Europe (Faarlund & Sunding 1992) and become naturalized in northern Europe, originating from ballast and escaped ornamentals (Lid & Lid 1994). It is now present in every state in the United States.

Management

Hand-pulling or cutting young plants can discourage bouncingbet from growing. The use of chemical and biological control methods has not been reported.

Notes

Bouncingbet was brought to the United States from Europe by early colonists.



Photo from KULAK (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Campus Kortrijk)

Family: Caryophyllaceae

Bouncingbet

A lather can be produced from the foliage of this plant, because of the saponins in the sap. Even white linens can be washed in the green soap suds. The common name is an old fashioned name for a wash-woman.