

Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

Aggressive Ornamentals

Baby's Breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*)

Baby's Breath is a perennial herb native to Europe and Asia. It was introduced as a garden ornamental in the late 1800's. It is now widespread across Canada and the northern US. It has been observed growing in a variety of habitats. Although it grows on fine-textured and coarse-textured soils, in Alberta and BC most infestations are associated with the latter.

Biology

This abundantly branched perennial grows to almost 1 metre in height. Seedling plants emerge in early May and develop only one shoot the first year. Established plants have a deep, thick penetrating root system with abundant food reserves that give rise to new shoots in late April. Stems are smooth, linear leaves are opposite, hairless, with a prominent mid vein and grow 2 to 10 cm long. Plants do not flower until the third year when flower buds develop. Flowers are produced in white clusters about early June. Fruits begin forming in mid-July and split open when mature in late July.



Reproduction

The only type of vegetative reproduction is by an increase of shoots on older plants. Seed is the primary mechanism for reproduction with an average plant producing 13,700 seeds. The majority of seeds drop close to plants however some seeds are dispersed to remote locations by wind. Seeds show little or no dormancy.

Habitat

Baby's Breath is observed in a wide variety of habitats. Small infestations occur along roadsides, in ditches and vacant lots. Larger infestations are known in pastures and rangeland areas. In Canada, baby's breath is most aggressive in areas of low rainfall. Although it will grow in fine textured soils, this soil type retards its root development. Baby's breath depends on stored food reserves in the roots for perennial regrowth, therefore prefers coarser soils where extensive root systems are better able to develop.

Concern

Baby's Breath is invasive on sub-marginal farm or grazing land. When it escapes cultivation it out-competes native and introduced perennial grasses. Baby's breath infested hay contains reduced crude protein content. It is considered unsightly on vacant lots and along fencelines. Baby's Breath is used as a garden ornamental and extensively in the floral industry for bouquets.



Baby's-breath invading grassland

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