

Steeplebush

Spiraea tomentosa

Spiraea tomentosa (steeplebush or hardhack) is a native, deciduous shrub (2–4 ft. tall) found in North American wetlands, bogs, and meadows. It is characterized by upright, woody, rusty-hairy stems, dark green leaves with fuzzy, brown undersides, and conical pink flower plumes in mid-to-late summer.

Identification

Flowers: Dense, narrow, cone-shaped or "steeple-like" panicles, blooming from the top down, primarily pink to rose-purple.

Leaves: Simple, alternate, elliptical-oblong with coarsely serrated edges. Upper surface is dark green and smooth, while the underside is densely covered in white, grey, or rusty woolly hairs.

Stems: Rigid, erect, and woody, with a rusty, woolly felt covering on new growth, becoming hairless and brown with age.

Growth Habit: Forms colonies (thickets) via suckering roots, usually 2–4 feet tall.

Habitat: Prefers wet, acidic soils in full sun, including wet prairies, meadows, swamps, and boggy, low-lying areas.

Control

Mechanical Removal: Cut the shrubs down and pull out the entire root system to prevent regrowth.

Cutting and Herbicide Treatment: Cut stems at ground level and immediately apply herbicide gel or a stump killer (such as glyphosate or triclopyr) to the cut surfaces to kill the root system.

Root Management: If full removal is difficult, cut stems to the ground and repeatedly manage any regenerating root suckers.

Mowing: Frequent mowing may help manage the spread of colonies, as they can tolerate, but may not be killed by, regular mowing.

