Physostegia virginiana

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Introduction

This native, herbaceous perennial grows up to about 3-feet-tall in one season, flowering in mid-summer to fall in prominent spikes (Fig. 1). Plants provide the landscape with the same effect as snapdragons. Flowers are arranged in four rows along the spike forming a showy head of white to rose-purple inflorescence.

General Information

Scientific name: Physostegia virginiana
Pronunciation: fye-soe-STEE-jee-uh ver-jin-nee-AY-nuh
Common name(s): False Dragonhead, Obedient Plant
Family: Labiatae
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 10A (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 7: year round
Planting month for zone 8: year round
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Origin: native to North America
Uses: naturalizing; cut flowers; mass planting
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet
Spread: .5 to 1 feet
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: open
Growth rate: fast
Texture: medium
Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: oblong

Figure 1. False Dragonhead.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white; rose-purple
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: unknown
Fruit cover: unknown
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: usually with one stem/trunk
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; sand; clay; acidic; slightly alkaline; loam;
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 12 to 18 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: may self-seed each year
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests
Use and Management

Dragonhead is used in perennial borders as an accent when it is in bloom. Clumps spread rapidly by seed so be prepared to divide it and replant to control the lateral spread of the plant. They are especially suited to wet soils and suffer unless they receive irrigation in dry weather. Expect them to be shorter in dry landscapes.

Cultivars and varieties have been selected for flower color and include var. alba with pure white flowers; ‘Bouquet Rose’ with pink flowers; and `Variegata’ with green and white variegated leaves. ‘Summer Snow’ is reportedly less invasive than the species.

Pests and Diseases

A rust fungus occasionally spoils the plant.