

TREES AND PLANTS

VIRGINIA SPIREA

ABOUT

Virginia Spirea (*Spiraea virginiana*) is a shrub three to seven feet in height that is related to the Rose family. Each stock of individual plants consists of a number of upright or arching stems growing from underground rootstock. The leaves alternate along the length of the stem and vary from two to four inches in size. The plant flowers in June and July with blooms of creamy white that grow in clusters at the ends of the leafy branches. Their habitat is usually rocky, high banks along rivers or streams that have been cleared out by floods. It is thought that the flood cleansing may be important to this species because it decreases competition from larger trees and plants and helps create perfect conditions for its root system.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Virginia Spirea is an endangered species. It is found only in Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia. Out of 24 populations in these six states, the largest clusters are found in West Virginia along the Gauley, Meadow, Bluestone, and Greenbrier rivers, numbering over 5,000 plants in total. It is believed that the world's largest population is in the Gauley River Gorge. Many miles of habitat along streams have been lost through reservoir construction, and the building of the Summersville Dam destroyed about a third of the habitat along the Gauley River. Another threat is the clearing of riverside sites for fishing, camping, and rafting. Human recreational activities like hiking and fishing have resulted in breakage of the fragile stems of the Virginia Spirea. Attempts by botanists to germinate the seeds of this plant have only been mildly successful. To keep these plants from disappearing will require maintenance of their streamside habitat with natural flood patterns and no further damming of rivers where the plants are found.

For more detailed information visit: www.wvdnr.gov or www.fws.gov.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What dam in West Virginia destroyed about a third of Virginia Spirea's habitat?

- a) The Summersville Dam
- b) The Greenbrier River Dam
- c) The Gauley Dam
- d) The Great Gorge Dam

Answer is A.

