

## Plants of the Heritage Garden—Bouncing Bet by Friends of the Garden

Bouncing Bet, or common soapwort, is botanically known as *Saponaria officinalis*, 'Rosea Plena'. It is a member of the Pink family, Caryophyllaceae, and like pinks the flowers are delightfully fragrant. The name soapwort derives from the fact that the stems of this plant, when boiled in water, create a soapy effect. Historically, this plant was used in Europe to clean and finish woolen clothes. More recently, it has been used for cleaning fragile antique fabrics. Medicinally, a decoction from the plant's roots has been used to alleviate poison-ivy rash and to reduce discoloration of a black eye.

In 1981, Dr. Aly O'Brien collected our plant from a roadside ditch in Holyrood. The plant is known to have been grown in Newfoundland since the mid-1800s.

Bouncing Bet is an upright perennial that can reach to 90cm. The sparsely branched stems have paired non-toothed, elliptical, hairless leaves up to

8cm in length.

Ragged, double flowers are about 2.5cm in diameter and are produced in clusters among

the upper leaf axils and stem terminus. They are light pink and highly fragrant. They flower in August and into September and their overall effect is not unlike garden phlox.



Bouncing Bet is easily divided since they have a somewhat running root system, so allow them some space to spread. They can tolerate poor soil, but perform better if given a good quality soil. The stems are somewhat weak and may require some support. They should be placed in full sun to facilitate the development of stronger stems.

