Soapwort Gentian
Gentiana saponaria

Description

Soapwort Gentian is an herbaceous perennial with a hairless stem that may grow to 2 feet (ca 60 cm) in height. The leaves are oppositely arranged, without a well-developed stalk, elliptic in shape, untoothed and usually hairy on the margin, and to 3 inches (7.5 cm) in length and to ½ inch (12 mm) in width. The blue tube-like flowers, appearing in September and October, are about 1½ inches (4 cm) in length and clustered at the top of the stem. The individual flowers, when unfolded, have 5 blue lobes that are united at their bases, but toward the flower tip are separated from each other by folds, or "plaits," which contrast in color and texture with the lobes. In Soapwort Gentian, the plaits are slightly shorter (by 2 mm or less) than the lobes at the top of the flower, and have small teeth along their margin. The green calyx of the flower, located beneath the petal tube, is partly united at the base and has lobe-like tips that have marginal hairs. The fruit is pod-like and contains many seeds.

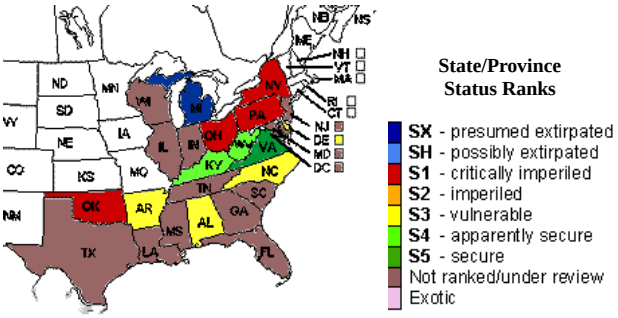
Photo source: Carol and Hugh Nourse @ University Tennessee Herbarium

Distribution & Habitat

Soapwort Gentian ranges from New York to Wisconsin and south into Florida and Texas. In Pennsylvania, it has been documented historically mostly in the southeastern and southwestern counties. It grows in moist openings and clearings, open woods, utility rights-of-way, and swamps.

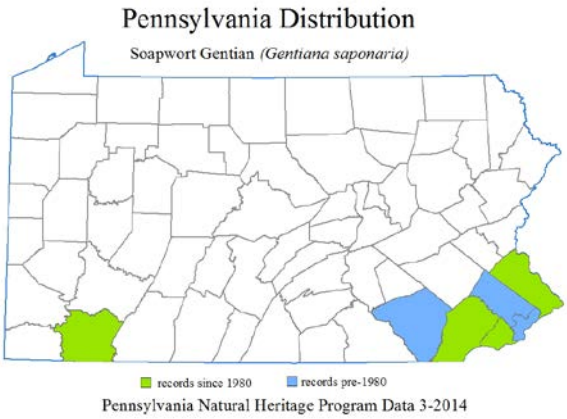
North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2014



Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Soapwort Gentian to be a species of special concern, based on the limited number of locations that have been recently confirmed. It has a PA legal rarity status of Tentatively Undetermined, but has been assigned a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.



Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Soapwort Gentian and its habitat often requires maintaining early successional conditions and controlling invasive species. Active management, such as periodic mowing or prescribed fire, may be needed to create the proper successional stage and ecological conditions for this species to thrive. Habitat loss and deer browse are threats in some locations.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; **S1S2** – Imperiled in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program

References

- NatureServe. 2014. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at http://www.natureserve.org/explorer
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2014.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.