



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



Flowers For Springtime

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It's mid-January as I put pen to paper, hardly the stuff of springtime yet, but fun to dream. In all fairness I must add, I have only had to be plowed twice (well, then came February) and have only been able to watch the snowmobiles one evening. That is not to say I imagine this will continue though I'm not one to complain.



Still, whatever the next months bring, let's take an imaginary walk outside in mid-July to enjoy a lovely shrub that should be blossoming just about now. Perhaps we can pick a flowery bouquet for a loved one.

I'd be standing then beside a spiraea (popularly spelled spirea) if the snow weren't now still deep and the plant looking as dead as any at this time of year, just a bunch of pointed sticks.

I selected this, the Corymbed Spiraea because of its shape and color, a nice pink, perfect for the season. And it does look like something one might (catch that might) hand as a bouquet to a

favored one. Only not right now.

Well, I got this far and my references are talking about a WHITE flower on a short shrub. Can I be that far off?

Not this time. I want Corymbed Spiraea Japonica which has pictures they could have borrowed from me. It's a deciduous perennial (good!) that was native to Japan, Korea and China before becoming naturalized throughout much of the eastern and Midwest sections of our country.

This shrub is one of several in the Spiraea family with alternate, simple leaves, on wiry, freely branching and erect stems. The round stems which may be hairy range in color from brown to reddish-brown. The leaves may be



roundish or egg-shaped and are coarsely toothed but only from the middle to the tip. The plant can grow to be three feet high and can be found, according to Newcomb, in rocky woods and banks from New Jersey and Pennsylvania south. New York sneaked in there too though I'd really not call my yard "rocky." Well, OK, everything here is – just ask the men who built the house.

It seems to be happiest in wetland areas. I did not know the hill was but, again, what around here isn't? Preferring full sun (like the majority of us), it will tolerate partial shade (like all of us – or we wouldn't be living here). Give it lots of water during the growing season (April showers and all) but it will turn up its pretty flowers and complain if the soil becomes saturated. (It's safe here on my hillside.) It has soil preferences but will abide anywhere if it has to. (It has to.) It was introduced in North America as an ornamental landscape plant and first cultivated in the northeastern states around 1870.



The flowers grow in clusters that are wider than long and may be white or pale pink. (Again, nobody told the ones blooming here for they are a lovely deep pink, hardly pale. The pictures on the internet do not show a pale flower either.) Each flower has five sepals and five petals. The plant is a member of the Rose Family.

Larvae of many kinds of moths like this plant as do grouse and, in the summer, deer. Native Americans ate one of the species, *Spiraea betulifolia*, though nothing I found explains why only that one species entered their diets or where, for that matter, it can be found.

Spiraea could also be used for medicinal purposes, particularly the *betulifolia* for abdominal pain. It was enjoyed as a tea too. The Blackfoot Indians used the root of a different variety as an enema or to treat venereal conditions.

Spiraea contain salicylates. Acetylsalicylic acid was first isolated from *Filipendula ulmaria*, a species at the time classified in the genus *Spiraea*. The word "aspirin" was coined by adding a- for acetylato to Aspirin from a German words referring to *spiraea*.

Other Native Americans found this shrub useful for making brooms. They also used it when they wanted to hang seafood to cook.

Seems like each variety of *Spiraea* has different purposes though I can't really understand why that should be so. Apparently, Meadowsweets include all *spiraea* with the one I have, *Corymbed Spiraea*, being just one of who-know-how many species.

Tell you what. Let's forget all this and just roam back into the yard, warmer days permitting, to enjoy the lovely flowers.

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