**Polygonum capitatum** C.F. Buchanan ex D. Don          Pinkhead Knotweed

*(Persicaria capitata)*

**Other Common Names:** Creeping Fleeceflower, Creeping Polygonum, Magic Carpet Plant, Magic Carpet Polygonum, Pinkhead Smartweed.

**Family:** Polygonaceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** This species is used most frequently as a summer annual in USDA zones 7 and colder; it will often return as a dieback herbaceous perennial in 8 or 9a and as an evergreen herbaceous perennial in zones 9 to 11.

**Foliage:** Evergreen in warmer climates; alternate; simple; ovate to cordate, tending to be more broadly ovate to cordate on cultivated selections; 1 O to 2 Q O long; leaves nearly sessile with the stipules clasping the stem; tips acute; bases rounded to cordate; margins ciliolate; a prominent watermark-like bronze chevron or wedge is present in the center of each leaf; the bronze watermark is more prominent in hot dry climates; the midrib and margins may also be flushed red; venation is pinnate.

**Flower:** Inflorescences are small ½ O to ¾ O diameter marble-size dense clusters of individual elongated ¼ O to ¼ O diameter narrow bell-shaped flowers; individual flowers often appearing closed, resulting in a sort of spiky pink ball; clusters are held prominently on peduncles above the foliage; flowers change color from nearly white to medium pink as they mature; flowering is year-round in the tropics, but bloom occurs mostly in spring to late summer in temperate regions.

**Fruit:** Small achenes; fruit are not showy but may be produced in prodigious quantities on some sites.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — more or less round in cross-section; spreading horizontally along the ground, crisscrossing each other to form a solid canopy; nodes conspicuously swollen; new stems are green, tannish pink or flushed pink, red to bronze in color with bristle-like translucent whitish hairs; Buds — foliose; green or tinged bronze; tiny; many elongating shortly after forming; Bark — not applicable.

**Habit:** *Polygonum capitatum* is a low growing mat forming vine-like groundcover; plants are seldom more than 4 N to 6 N tall, but root from the nodes to spread indefinitely as a perennial; as an annual, typical spreads are 12 O to 18 O in a single growing season; the overall texture is medium to medium-fine.

**Cultural Requirements:** This species is usually grown in spots with shade to partial shade in our region, but will tolerate sunnier location if given adequate moisture and well drained soils; plants will grow on a wide range of soils types and pH as long as they are not overly wet; this species has a tendency to overgrow its bounds over time and seed in prolifically on favorable sites, thus it should be used with caution.

**Pathological Problems:** Root rots often occur on wet poorly drained soils.

**Ornamental Assets:** The handsome green and bronze foliage and flowers, which form a dense low mat topped by showy pink flower clusters, constitute the primary assets; plants are also tolerant of a wide range of sites.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Limited cold tolerance and a propensity to be come weedy are the primary limitations.

**Landscape Utilization:** Pinkhead Knotweed is often used as a seasonal or permanent groundcover in southern portions of our region; it is however, more commonly used as a sprawling rockgarden plant, or weeping annual for containers, hanging baskets, or window boxes in cooler zones; good groundcover plantings can be seen in sites ranging from Houston and Beaumont to irrigated locations in Austin.
**Other Comments:** The genus name is derived from the Greek words for many (polys) and either offspring (gonos) or knee-joint (gony); either of the later two words would be appropriate given this species weedy tendencies and characteristic swollen nodes which resemble an arthritic knee; the specific epithet refers to the head-like flower structure.

**Native Habitat:** Himalayas; naturalized in some portions of the U.S.

**Related Taxa:** *Polygonum* L. was formerly a genus of about a 150 species of widely distributed annuals and perennials, mostly herbaceous, or rarely shrubs; however, some taxonomists are now splitting many of these species into other genera; for example, *Polygonum capitatum* is classified by some authorities as *Persicaria capitata*; several species of *Polygonum* are considered to be agronomic or horticultural weeds; *Polygonum cuspidatum* R.J. Siebert & J.G. Zuccarini (*Fallopia japonica, Pleuropterus cuspidatus, Pleuropterus zuccarinii, Polygonum zuccarinii, Reynoutria japonica*), commonly known as Japanese Knotweed or Mexican-Bamboo, is a strongly erect USDA zone 4 to 9 perennial to 8 ft tall with a bamboo-like appearance; unfortunately, *P. cuspidatum*, is extremely invasive when adapted to a given region and probably should not be planted in cultivated gardens.

**References:** Hodgson, 2002; Marston, 1993; Still, 1994; Winterrowd, 2004.

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