

PENSTEMON CANESCENS (Britt.) Britt.
Gray Beard-tongue

FAMILY: Scrophulariaceae

HABIT: Herbaceous rhizomatous perennial, 4-8 dm.; flowering May-July; fruiting July, August.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Most Ohio species of *Penstemon* are superficially similar, but this species is most similar to *P. pallidus*. Distinctions between these two species are sometimes very vague. *P. canescens* generally has broader, thinner, less pubescent leaves than *P. pallidus*. In addition, *P. canescens* generally has a pink to purple corolla that is larger than that of *P. pallidus*. *P. pallidus* generally has a white corolla with purple lines inside.

TOTAL RANGE: PA to e. TN and n. AL, chiefly in the mountains, but also w. to s. IN.

STATE RANGE (as of 2008): Post-1980 records are from Lawrence County.

HABITAT: Dry open fields and roadsides.

HAZARDS: Overgrowth by woody species through succession.

RECOVERY POTENTIAL: Unknown, but probably good due to its rhizomatous habit and tolerance of disturbance.

INVENTORY GUIDELINES: Collect mature flowering specimens. Note whether the corolla is open or closed, and press some flowers spread open to reveal floral characters.

COMMENTS: Not all specimens of this extremely variable genus can be identified with certainty. Flower color, a diagnostic character traditionally used in keys, is extremely variable and unreliable, and may be affected by available sunlight. Hybridization between *Penstemon* species may cause some of the variations.

In a limited area of southeastern Ohio, this species can be common and even somewhat weedy. Its general distribution in Ohio is probably well known.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

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Pennell, F.W. 1935. The Scrophulariaceae of eastern temperate North America.
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