

## Petasites or Pestasites?

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Pet or Pest? That is the question. No, it's no longer a question. It was THE question for a long, long time—longer than I care to admit. As gardeners, we all give our plants the special attention they require—protecting, coddling, curtailing—to include them in our borders. But there are limits. How much was I willing to put up with to enjoy this plant's presence in my garden? And it was PRESENT!

Left alone, it would have consumed 450 square feet in three years.

From April to November, I went on weekly Petasites patrol, slicing off up to a dozen new petasites shoots each time.

People who came over, admired and left with a petasites start (with warnings) stopped coming around.

One morning I tripped over a raised brick in a previously smooth path. Curled malevolently beneath was a half inch thick petasites root.

Bits of root in the excavation dirt from the above mentioned path resulted in dozens of plants in the dirt pile.

It sent a leaf three feet up a downspout.

It sent a shoot behind a four-foot retaining wall and emerged triumphant at the top.

This was its final atrocity. Out came the Roundup (after another year of petasites cost/benefit analysis). After that were three years of digging survivors.

As an experiment, I transplanted several petasites to the yard of a friend. His small border had been decimated (imagine a lunar landscape) by the romping and tromping of two very large, active puppies. There wasn't even a blade of grass left in the lawn.

Petasites flourished.

The dogs are now four years old and a bit less active. Burdock, plantain, and various things with thorns are doing well. (My friend, who is not a gardener, can't see why I insist on pulling the burdock if Petasites is allowed. He can't even distinguish the two.) Grass still will not grow. The sedum survives, although bruised. The peony manages one stalk. On hot summer days the dogs sleep in the shade of petasites huge leaves. Perhaps, after all, there is an appropriate place for this plant.

For those not familiar with *Petasites japonica*, it is grown primarily for its huge, heart-shaped leaves. It likes shade, moisture and room to spread. With good reason, it is not included in many lists of garden perennials.

I still miss it.

—Ruth Cadoret