



Common Name: CUTLEAF BEARDTONGUE

Scientific Name: *Penstemon dissectus* Elliott

Other Commonly Used Names: dissected beardtongue

Previously Used Scientific Names: none

Family: Scrophulariaceae (snapdragon) or Plantaginaceae (plantain)

Rarity Ranks: G2/S2

State Legal Status: Rare

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: none

Description: Perennial **herb** with **stems** 12 - 16 inches (30 - 40 cm) tall. **Leaves** $\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches (1.5 - 6 cm) long, in widely spaced pairs, divided into many narrow segments, the tip of each segment with a tiny red knob. **Flower clusters** open, branching, at the top of the stem. **Flowers** about 1 inch (2.5 - 3 cm) long, with an inflated tube, a 2-lobed upper lip and 3-lobed lower lip; dark pink with a purple-streaked white throat; the “beard tongue” (a sterile stamen with a tuft of yellow hairs on the tip) extends beyond the flower opening. **Fruit** $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 cm) long, slightly woody, with a pointed beak.

Similar Species: This is the only beardtongue in the southeastern U.S. with deeply dissected leaves. False dragonheads (*Physostegia* spp.) have pink, 2-lipped flowers but undivided leaves. False foxgloves (*Agalinis* spp.) have pink, bell-shaped flowers with spreading petals and narrow, undivided leaves.

Related Rare Species: Small’s beardtongue (*Penstemon smallii*, Special Concern) is endemic to the southern Appalachians, occurring in woodlands, road banks, glades, and cliffs; it occurs in 4 Blue Ridge counties in Georgia. It is 16 - 28 inches (40 - 70 cm) tall; the basal leaves are up to 8 inches (20 cm) long, the stem leaves up to 6 inches (15 cm) long and 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide, with toothed edges. Flowers resemble cutleaf beardtongue’s, but are in leafy clusters with up to 50 flowers.

Habitat: Altamaha Grit outcrops and surrounding longleaf pine woodland.

Life History: Cutleaf beardtongue is a perennial herb that reproduces sexually. Penstemons (meaning “almost stamen”) are named for the staminode, the bristly, sterile, fifth stamen or “beardtongue” in each flower. The beardtongue, which is usually exerted and showy, attracts insects and also increases contact between fertile flower parts and visiting insect pollinators – the weight of the pollinator pressing down on the staminode brings the anthers and stigmas into contact with the insect. Cutleaf beardtongue is probably pollinated by a variety of bees and bee-flies. Its seeds are dispersed by wind, gravity, and small animals.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (late April–May) and fruiting (late May–August).

Range: Cutleaf beardtongue occurs only in Georgia.

Threats: Logging and clearing around Altamaha Grit outcrops, off-road-vehicle use on outcrops, fire suppression in longleaf pine woodlands.

Georgia Conservation Status: More than 30 populations are known, but only 2 are on conservation lands.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Protect Altamaha Grit outcrops and surrounding woods from logging, clearing, and off-road-vehicles. Apply prescribed fire every 2 - 3 years.

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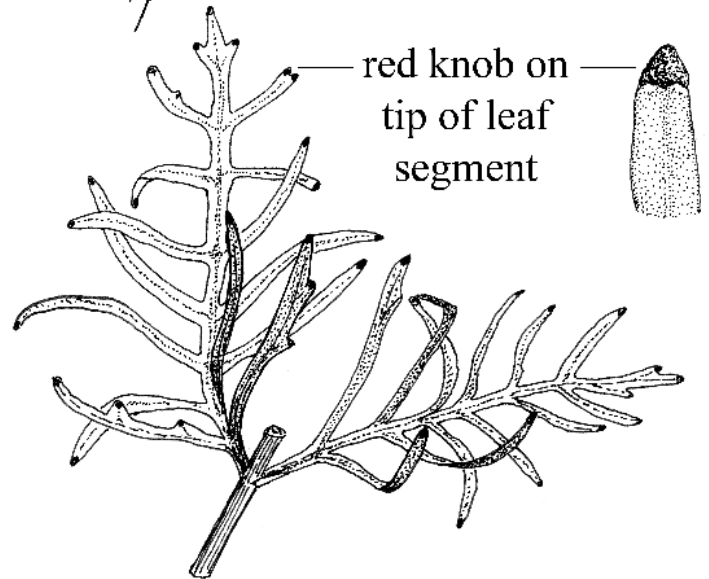
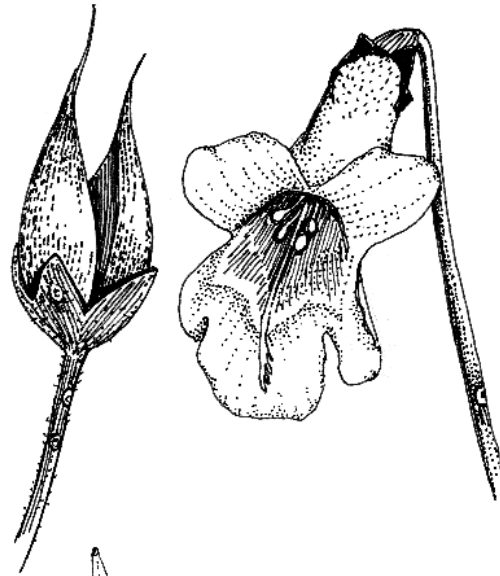
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L. Chafin, July 2008: original account

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