



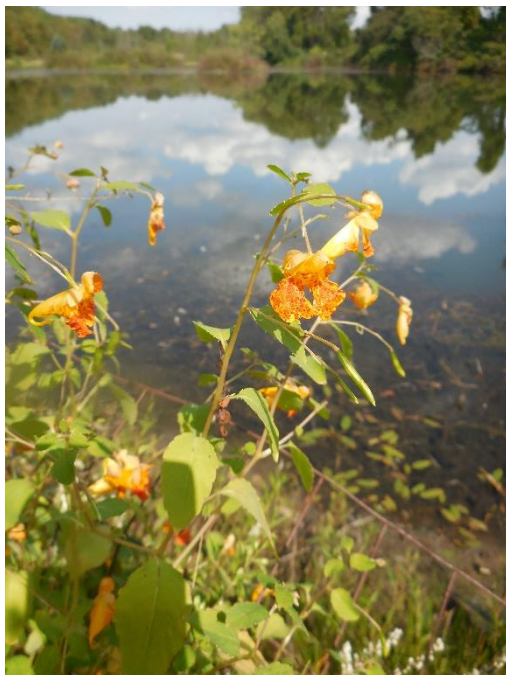
“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

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



A Fun Plant

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Since I just wrapped up my Musings on the Oriole, let me linger in the oranges with a lovely eye-catching plant.

Seems we've been hanging on for too long to plants that may (I must stress the “may” part for I don't encourage experimenting with unknowns) help or cure some of us.

This choice has some benefits (perhaps they all do, besides their interesting variety of shapes and colors). The touch-me-not-family is frequently soft and somewhat succulent herbs with leafy, pale, translucent stems and usually nodding flowers. (Yes, the National Audubon Society calls it an herb, Balsaminaceae.)

The Balsam family has about a thousand species and nothing whatever to do with the tree. There is also a single hydrocera which flowers in SE Asia, the only one that isn't in the genus which includes impatiens.

The juice from the crushed stem can be used to alleviate poison ivy or nettles which may grow close by because of the binding action of the chemical lawsone. Native Americans used it on even more skin conditions. Also used to treat athlete's foot, in this case scientific data confirms the fungicidal qualities.

Frequently known simply as Jewelweed, the Spotted Touch-Me-Not is a delightful wildflower to come across. Unlike its paler cousin, this plant enjoys very moist soil which is why I found mine at the edge of the lake. It has an unusual and quite attractive flower, orange for this with darker orange spots and a lemon yellow for the Paler version. That one has a less developed pod but can grow an extra foot to be six feet high.

The name comes from its unusual habit of popping open when mature if touched or, if not, just expelling its fruit from its plump pod when ripe. The inch long flowers



dangle from a long stalk with a short inward-curved spur at the back. (The paler isn't as spotted with its spur shorter and coming out at a right angle. The stem from either variety is very succulent. The leaves are large, egg-shaped and coarsely toothed.)

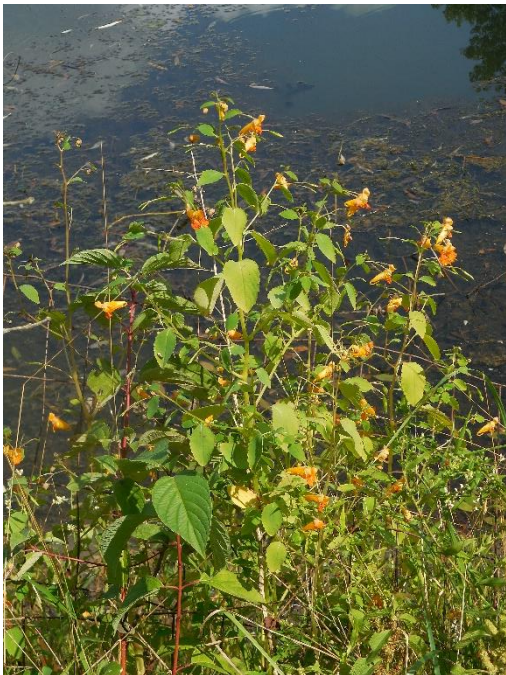
Found in shaded wetlands and woods, this is an annual which can occur in dense stands and has adapted to hummingbird visitations with butterflies and bees important for its pollination. Submerge the leaves and you'll find they take on a silvery look.

In the habit of tucking away far too many articles that may one day prove of use, I lucked out finding this undated but old AP feature by Lee Reich on Jewelweed.

“Not all Jewelweed are alike. There is an orange-flowered jewelweed, often looked upon scornfully by some people, also known as spotted touch-me-not. There is also a jewelweed with pale yellow flowers, appropriately called pale touch-me-not. Many people look upon this latter species with affection.

“These two plants – no, the whole Impatiens genus – highlight how arbitrary we can be in our judgment of plants. The outstanding quality of this genus is the ability of the plants to deck themselves out in bright, colorful flowers even when growing in the shade. Their 'impatient' method of seed dispersal might also be looked upon as a good quality if you want an annual plant that spreads and returns each year. Of course, a plant that is too good at this may become a weed – like the spotted touch-me-not.

Jewelweed is stigmatized from the outset by the 'weed' in its name, yet both species mentioned are pretty enough and occasionally have been offered by dealers in native plants . . . This plant has been described elsewhere as a 'course garden annual' that tends to naturalize in this country. HmMMMM. A garden flower or a weed?”



Reich continues, “You undoubtedly know the most famous member of the genus, simply called 'impatiens' – never jewelweed. The bright flowers of this widely planted annual brighten shady gardens from the Atlantic to the Pacific with dazzling flowers that are either white or some shade of red.

“A few years ago, a yellow-flowered variety of impatiens, dubbed African Queen, was introduced with much fanfare. If you look beyond the ballyhoo, you might notice that African Queen is very reminiscent of the spotted and pale jewelweeds.”

If you can find them, enjoy the beauty during the summer and then return to touch the pod (oh! so slightly!) and watch them explode, tiny seeds aloft!

Written June 8, 2021