



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

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



Butter-and-Eggs

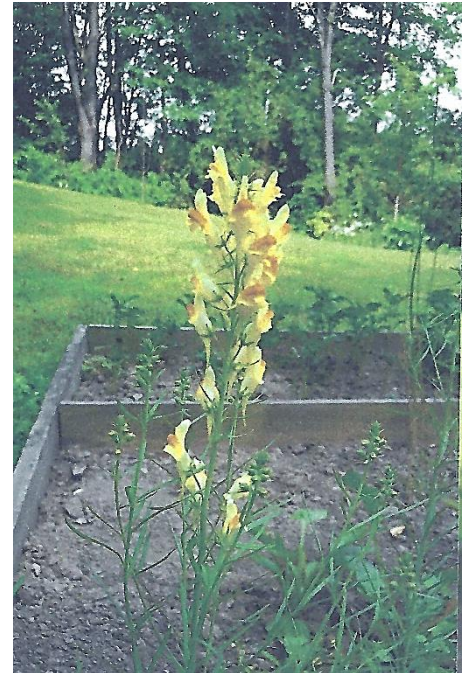
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It was Emmy, the friend who led me into the waterless wilderness at Heart's Content, who, on a very different occasion, spotted this intriguing plant.

Butter-and-eggs (isn't that a marvelous name for a flower?) popped up right in the middle of my garden proving I'm not as thorough a weeder as I proclaim.

According to my notes, I had seen one by the road near my home in September of 2004 but let's give Emmy the credit in 2012 for knowing its name. That was in July so it appears this plant may be around here for quite a while.

July of 2012 was a very bad year for the garden for my pictures show the soil is as dry as it could be. Only weedy things are prospering, butter-and-eggs among them.



Peterson places it right above Yellow Lady's-slipper which is such a rarity (certainly to me) that I hardly think

it belongs on the same page: “Note the clublike spikes of snapdragonlike flowers with orange palates, thin drooping spurs. Numerous glaucous [bluish green or greenish blue for the curious] green leaves. 1-3 feet. Roadsides, waste places, dry fields. Throughout.”



It may be in the book next to the Lady's-slipper and both may be yellow but that's as far as any similarity goes. Both, like Foxglove on the same Peterson page, are worth even more than just a second glance.

Butter-and-eggs can also be called Toadflax or yellow toadflax and is a member of the snapdragon family. It's a native of Europe, Siberia, and Central Asia. Introduced in this country, it is now commonly found throughout North America.

Newcomb has nothing extra to offer so let's turn to the National Audubon Society Field Guide to Wildflowers: This plant has yellow, 2-lipped, spurred flowers in a terminal cluster on a leafy stem. The flowers are about an inch long, having 5 sepals with an upper corolla 2-lobed lip; the lower corolla lip is



three-lobed with orange ridges and a prominent spur at its base. It has four stamens, one pistil with a green style.

Because the flower is largely covered by its underlip, strong bees and bumblebees are required for pollination. It can be mildly toxic to livestock.

The fruit is a globe-shaped capsule with numerous small seeds.

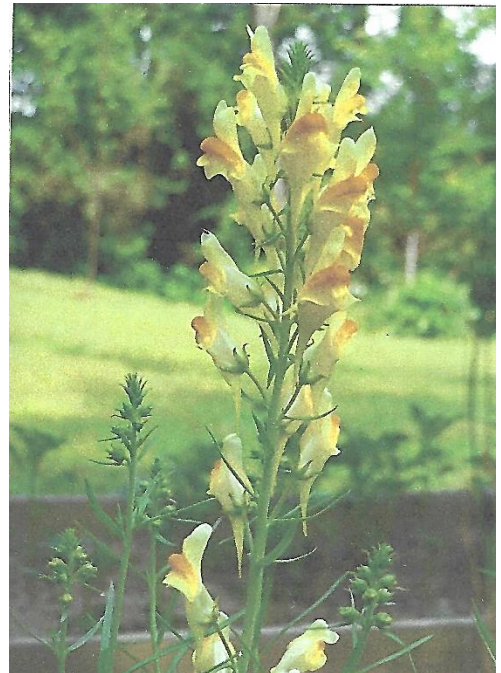
It can grow from one to three feet in height and can be found flowering from May to October and can be located from Alberta east to Newfoundland, south to Florida and west to Texas, north to North Dakota plus throughout the West. (Looks

like only the West Coast is missing out on this beauty.)

To return to Audubon: This weedy European introduction is now naturalized over much of North America. It grows from creeping roots (the bane of my existence in some plants!) and can form small to large colonies which thrive in dry sites. It is considered a noxious weed in Virginia and several western states.

“An orange path on the corolla's lower lip leads to nectar contained in the long spur and serves as a 'honey guide' for insects.” The name toadflax refers to the opening of the corolla, which looks like the moth of a toad, and to the leaves, which resemble those of flax. The common name Butter-and-eggs allude to the color combination of the corolla.”

Sometimes these are cultivated as cut flowers which can last in a vase for a long time. It's also a favorite in children's gardens for by “snapping” they can be made to “talk” by squeezing the base of the corolla. (Don't expect to hear anything. It's the movement of the “mouth” to which they refer.)



And they are mentioned prominently in folk medicine. A tea is used as a laxative with strong diuretic as well as for jaundice, dropsy and enteritis. A tea made with milk instead of water can be used as an insecticide with fever-reducing properties.

Colloquial names include brideweed, bunny haycocks, bunny mouths, calf's snout, dead men's bones and imprudent lawyers (fun!) and on.

Perhaps I simply live on the wrong side of the moon but butter-and-eggs, like many of the other wildflowers I have highlighted, seem rare enough to be treasured.

I know I will keep looking.

Written July 30,2021.