

Explosive Pod: Jewelweed

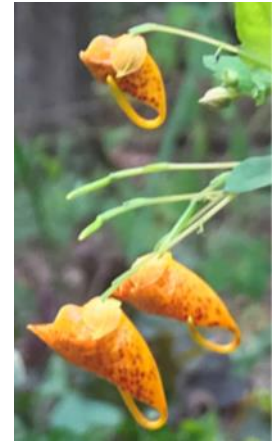
(Originally published 9/16/2020)



The bright orange flowers of Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*) beckon viewers to take a closer look. But touch a ripened seed pod while doing so and you'll be in for a surprise - an explosion of seeds! This makes jewelweed an especially fun plant to look for in autumn.

Look for this Maine native in wet woodlands and moist, shady areas. It grows 2-5 feet tall on slender, fragile stems. Leaves are oval and toothed along the edges. Once you find a stand of jewelweed, sit back and watch. Hummingbirds feed on the nectar and rely on it during their autumn migration. The angle of the flower's nectar spur is specific to hummingbirds, making them the primary pollinator of jewelweed. Bumblebees also search out the flower, which blooms mid-summer to frost, and are important secondary pollinators. Butterflies and other long-tongued insects seek out the nectar as well.

Jewelweed stems are very watery. The stem sap is a traditional topical treatment for skin rashes and poison ivy. The sap also has anti-fungal properties and is used for treating athlete's foot. It is important to note that some people are sensitive to jewelweed and may develop a severe skin rash from the juice.



Nectar spur bending under each flower in this side-view.

Interesting Facts

- A self-seeding annual that is easy to propagate in early autumn.
- Has two types of flowers: 1. those that open for pollination, and 2. smaller, inconspicuous flowers that never open. Instead, they fertilized themselves without pollen exchange with another flower. They are called cleistogamous flowers. Look for these 1 mm long flowers at the base of leaves.
- One of a few native plants that can out compete the non-native invasive [garlic mustard \(*Alliaria petiolata*\)](#).

Activities for Children & the Young at Heart

1. Find a patch of jewelweed and record all the flying visitors you see.
2. Observe the seed pods of jewelweed and compare to other seeds you see during autumn. Are they all the same shape or different? Do they disperse their seeds in the same or different ways? Keep a list of all the seeds you find and what you observe. Make a drawing of each with your notes.



Seed pods ripening.

Share Nature Note with your friends, family, teachers, scouts, and anyone you think might be interested. Here is how they can sign up for a free subscription:

- Text DACF NATURE to 468311 OR [Subscribe online](#)

[Read back issues online](#). Suggest a topic by email; put *Nature Note* in Subject line and email [Jocelyn Hubbell](#).