

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 145

Jewel Weed

Description

Jewel weed has stems that are somewhat translucent and succulent; they have swollen or darkened nodes. The seed pods are pendant and have projectile seeds that explode from the pods when they are lightly touched. The plant grows 2 to 5 feet tall and then blooms.

The flowers are orange with dark-red spots and bloom from May through October in the eastern part of North America from southern Canada to the northern part of Florida.

Botanical Name

The jewel weed's botanical name is *Impatiens capensis*. *Impatiens* flowers take their name from the Latin *impatiens*: "impatient." They are named this because their ripe seed pods will sometimes burst open from even a light touch as if they were "impatient" to open.

Another common name for *Impatiens capensis* is the spotted touch-me-not, again, in reference to the tendency of the ripe seed pod to burst apart at the slightest touch.

Habitat

Jewel weed is a native to Ontario and prefers to grow in moist woodlands, partially or lightly shaded floodplains along rivers, edges of woodland paths, swamps, seeps and fens, and roadside ditches.

This species tolerates disturbance better than most wetland plants.

Although *impatiens* flowers can, with sufficient water, be grown in partial sun in northerly regions, their great virtue is that they thrive in the shade. For ultimate growth, jewel weed should be used in moist shade or woodland gardens, bog gardens, native-plant gardens, ponds or stream margins. They are also used in container gardens, ranging from hanging baskets to window boxes.

Value

Jewel weed can be an easy plant to maintain because it is a native to Ontario and has had time to evolve and be resistant to many pests and diseases. The bright-orange flowers will brighten your garden and act as natural feeders for visiting hummingbirds and butterflies.

Jewel weed has often been referred to as nature's poison ivy treatment. The sap in the stems is similar to that of the aloe vera plant, which works as a poison ivy remedy and helps cure other skin rashes. Also, if the stems are used while still young and tender, one can cut them up and cook them like green beans.

Jewel weed works as a good filler in garden beds and will add a splash of colour where needed. This plant is great to use in clay soils since it loves damp places. It will flourish where other plants will have difficulties— in shady, damp places.

Lea Thompson, Class of 2009