

# BWSR Featured Plant

**Name: Spotted Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*)**

Plant family: Touch-me-not (*Balsaminaceae*)



If “impatiens” sounds familiar, you might have heard of its cultivated relatives. The garden plant commonly known as African impatiens is a staple of nurseries and garden centers. New Guinea impatiens is another relative.

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Susan Nelson



Spotted or orange jewelweed is a native annual that thrives in moist or wet soils. Its shiny, dangling flowers and the beads of water that collect on its leaves glisten like jewels in the sun. Impatiens is Latin for “impatient,” describing the capsules’ explosive release of ripe seeds. Touch a mature capsule and it will burst in your hand, inspiring the common name touch-me-not. Capensis means “of the cape,” from a centuries-old misunderstanding that the plant is native to the Cape of Good Hope.

**Plant Stats**

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** FACW

**PRIMARY USES:** Pollinators’ food source; ethnobotany

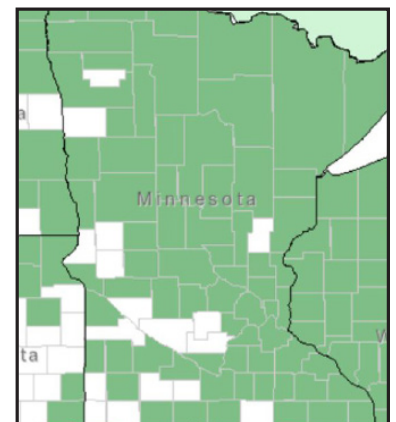
## Identification

Spotted jewelweed is a branching plant, growing 2 to 5 feet tall. Its thin, oval leaves are opposite and toothed, typically 2 to 3 inches long and 1 to 2 inches wide. The smooth, green, translucent stems have swollen nodes. Flowers bloom from July through September. Spotted jewelweed’s orange flowers are funnel-shaped with an upper

lip, a lobed lower lip and two small petals on the sides. Flowers are characteristically dotted with dark orange or brown spots, although some flowers have few or no spots. A nectar-filled spur growing from the back of the flower curves down along at least one-third of the length of the funnel. The oblong capsules grow up to 1 inch long.

## Range

Common throughout Minnesota, spotted jewelweed grows in wetlands, ditches, along streambanks, moist woodlands and floodplains. Its range is roughly the eastern two-thirds of the United States plus Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Research has shown that the plant was introduced into those Western states.



**Range map source:** USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Plants Database

## Uses

Spotted jewelweed sap has long been used to relieve the itch of poison ivy and stinging nettle. Recent research confirms that jewelweed mash can ease the irritation, but it also found that soap is more effective. Spotted jewelweed attracts ruby-throated hummingbirds and many types of bees seeking late-season nectar and pollen sources.

## Planting Recommendations

This annual plant is easy to grow from seed. Choose a location with partial sun and wet or moist soils. Once established, jewelweed will reseed itself, forming dense patches. This quality

is useful where the plant's spread is welcome, but its growth can exclude other species. In Washington state, where jewelweed is not native, the plant was listed as a noxious weed in 2018.

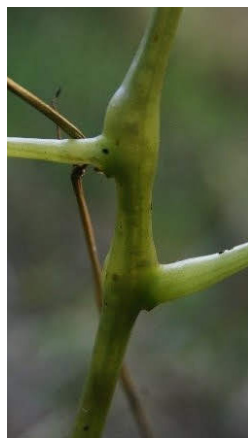


Oval, toothed leaves are thin and flexible. Spotted, orange flowers with long spurs produce oblong or elliptical capsules.

## Similar Species

Pale jewelweed (*I. pallida*) is a coarser plant with yellow flowers bearing shorter spurs. Its thicker

stems are glaucous — they have a waxy, bluish coating. Both pale and spotted jewelweed grow in wet soils.



**From left:** Stems of pale jewelweed are glaucous; those of spotted jewelweed are green. Flowers of pale jewelweed (yellow flower, top) and spotted jewelweed (orange flower, bottom) differ in color and spur length. Typical leaves of pale jewelweed are larger than those of spotted jewelweed.

## References

Illinois Wildflowers: [http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/wetland/plants/or\\_jewelweed.htm](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/wetland/plants/or_jewelweed.htm)

Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board: <https://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weeds/spotted-jewelweed>

Vicki Motz and David Kinder. The effectiveness of jewelweed, *Impatiens capensis*, the related cultivar *I. balsamina* and the component, lawsone in preventing post poison ivy exposure contact dermatitis. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 143 (1): 314-318. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22766473>

USDA NRCS Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=IMCA>

Developed by Susan Nelson