

# Technical Report



## Wetland Flora

No. 99-5 / May 1999

Gene Silberhorn

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# Jewelweed

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## Touch-me-not

*Impatiens capensis* Meerb.

### Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

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Jewelweed (2 to 4 feet tall) is often found in freshwater marshes, especially along tree shaded upland margins. It is a delightful herb with pale green, hollow, translucent stems and alternate, simple thin, but somewhat succulent, leaves. Leaves are green on the upper side and gray-green underneath. One is immediately drawn to the curiously shaped, orange-yellow flowers (about an inch long) with reddish/brown spots which look like a miniature cornucopia. Jewelweed is also known as touch-me-not because the seeds suddenly burst from the capsule when pressure is applied. Seeds may be propelled as far as 10 feet. The sap (mucilaginous texture similar to aloe) from this plant has been reported to counteract the toxin of poison ivy. The sap is extracted by crushing stems and leaves, and the crushed mass is applied to the affected part of the body before any visible reaction to the toxin has occurred. After a rash and/or blisters appear, it apparently has no effect. *Impatiens pallida* is a pale yellow, flowered species, also found in wet areas mainly in the mountains and piedmont of Virginia and North Carolina.

### Distribution

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*Impatiens capensis* is widely distributed throughout much of the North American continent.

### Habitat

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Jewelweed is most often found in shaded seepage areas, along streams, tree dominated flood plains and on the margins of swamps. This plant does well in saturated soils, but usually does not tolerate extended flooded conditions.

### Ecological Values/Benefits

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Hummingbirds feed upon flower nectar and the succulent seeds are a favorite food of song and game birds.

### Wetland Indicator Status

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According to the *Draft Revision of the National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Impatiens capensis* is classified as an **facultative wetland plant (FACW)**. FACW plants "usually occur in wetlands (estimated probability 67% to 99%)."

*Impatiens capensis* Meerb.

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