

## **Exploding Seed Pods: Impatiens and Wild Cucumber by Kathleen Sayce**

Plants that move quickly in response to touch are fascinating, as most only move in the wind, or shift slowly in response to the direction of sunlight.

Fast-moving plants seem almost like animals. Fly-traps can snap leaves shut on insects, and then digest them. Some tropical legumes quickly curl up their leaves in response to touch.

Many plants have exploding seed pods. Here's more about two of them:

Plants in the genus *Impatiens* have seed pods that open to a tap on the end when ripe. Children like to tap them and watch the small dark seeds jet outward, shooting several feet away, hence the name Touch-me-not. Local, and mostly native species of *Impatiens* all have bright orange to yellow flowers, and grow in wetland soils. The bright flowers give them a second common name, Jewelweed.

Another plant with exploding pods is wild cucumber, a large perennial vine with a huge body-sized tuber. Wild cucumber dies down to the ground each fall, and every spring and summer puts out long vines, looking like edible cucumbers, only more than 40 feet long, with long tendrils and tiny white flowers, followed by spiny small cucumber-shaped fruit.

When wild cucumber fruits ripen on hot days, in late summer to fall, the sections peel back quickly and eject the large seeds a few yards with a unique liquid farting sound. For a plant, that's pretty impressive!