

## **Jewelweed by Kathleen Sayce**

Jewelweeds are lively plants: when seed pods are ripe, they open explosively, tossing out the seeds as the pod sections curl away. The species that live here are a mix of native and introduced species. The local species are annuals, sprouting in mid to late spring, flowering in mid summer to late summer, and ripening seed from late summer to first frost.

Crosses between species are fertile, so in addition to the easy-to-identify species, there are crosses, or hybrids. Native orange jewelweed has flared orange petals with darker spots, a saccate, plump chamber like a snapdragon, and a spur on the back. Introduced yellow jewelweed has yellow flowers, no spur, and no spots. You can guess what's coming with crosses—yes, every combination of color (yellow to orange), spots or not, spur or not, can be seen in local populations.

A close relative, policeman's helmet, is a tall annual with pink, red-spotted flowers. One of my earliest flower memories is tapping cousins and siblings with pods, scattering seeds all over my grandmother's garden. This species can be so prolific that it shades and crowds out other herbaceous species, which for an annual plant is quite an accomplishment. It's a noxious weed, easily controlled each summer by pulling up plants before they flower.

The seeds float around in fresh to salt water, and can turn up expectedly in habitats quite unlike floodplains forests, where it is most common. I once found a jewelweed population at Leadbetter Point, on the bayside, among beachgrasses in a dense rolled mat of vegetation. The seedlings did not survive to flowering, but to get to that site, they crossed miles of salt water.