



Jewelweed

Alexis, Fairy Princess of the Shore, lived near a rushing stream. She was only 2 inches tall so when she walked among the shoreline plants the green stems were tree-sized and the leaves formed a dark canopy over her head. Princess Alexis was lonely, it was early in the spring and her insect friends were still either sleeping off the winter chill or on their long journey north. Her frog friends didn't have time to visit, they were too busy calling to mates and producing tadpoles. It seemed everyone was busy with spring chores except Alexis and she often found herself dozing on a rock at the river's edge.

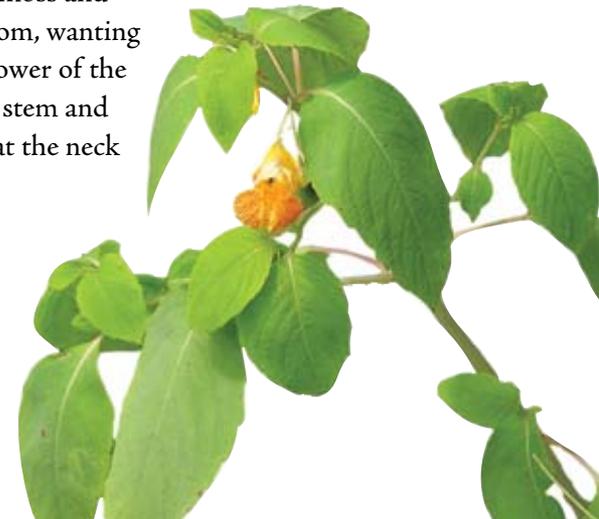




The sound of a large animal stomping through the brush woke Alexis. Was it a spotted fawn coming to sip from the river? It seemed larger than a fawn and Alexis saw with surprise that this creature had only two feet. Two bright yellow feet with enormous lady bugs crawling up the legs. The feet were as long as the princess was tall and seemed to smash everything in its path. Alexis let her eyes travel up and up, and up and up. Alexis had never seen a giant fairy like this; she had to be ten times as tall as the princess. And where were her wings? The giant had some type of a hood covering her head but nowhere that wings could be tucked in....

The giant was humming to herself, reaching out to touch everything she could. The bristly head of a sedge, long pointy hawthorne twigs, everything was of interest. Alexis leaped along, following in the footsteps of this curious giant, wishing she could tell her the names of all the plants that she stopped to sniff, or the pesky insect buzzing around her ear. But Alexis was bound to stay silent and could only play hide and seek with this new friend.

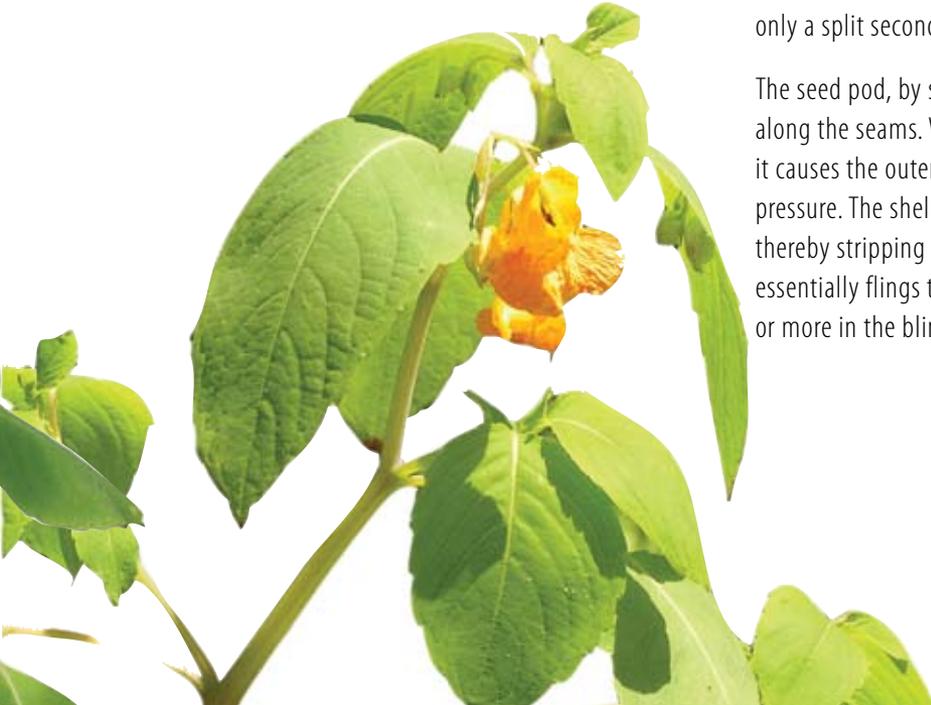
Alexis's giant paused at the shoreline. She sat down on a spongy bed of moss and before long her eyes were closed in sleep. Alexis looked around her kingdom, wanting to give something to her new companion. She spied the orange spotted flower of the jewelweed plants. The flower hung like a necklace pendant from its green stem and Alexis had an idea. She pulled the flower from its stalk and gently laid it at the neck of the giant. Her new friend had a jewel of her own to carry home. ≈



WADING A LITTLE DEEPER

One of the true jewels among our wetland flowers is aptly called jewelweed. Its other name is touch-me-not. Its brilliant orange flower hangs from a stem as a true jewel of nature, and its shape and color make it attractive to hummingbirds.

This flower is an annual, meaning that it lives for only one season and then grows anew from the seeds it produces. As a result it grows abundantly with ideal conditions in moist soil. While the name jewelweed is given due to its lovely flower, its alternate name touch-me-not has been attributed



to its method of seed dispersal. By late summer the jewelweed flower has wilted and a small elongated capsule is formed in its place. It begins to swell in preparation for dispersing its seeds for the year.

When the seedpod is ripe it will literally explode at the slightest touch, thereby tossing its seeds wide among the surrounding moist soil where new plants will grow the following year. I once took the time to observe this mechanism for seed dispersal, but it took a long time to intentionally detonate several dozen before I could determine what it was doing in only a split second.

The seed pod, by swelling, also builds up pressure along the seams. When the end of the pod is touched it causes the outer shell to separate under built up pressure. The shell of each chamber curls inward, thereby stripping the seed contained within and essentially flings them in all directions, up to six feet or more in the blink of an eye.

QUICK CLIPS

- 🌿 Jewelweed belongs to the impatiens family.
- 🌿 It commonly grows close to stinging nettles in moist soil, but the juice found in its stem is also a natural medicine that relieves the burn of nettles and the itch of mosquito bites.
- 🌿 Jewelweed can easily be grown in areas of moist soil although collecting its seeds can prove to be a challenge.
- 🌿 Perhaps the best technique for gathering seeds to introduce to a new area is to cover the seedpods with a bag and set them off to gather the seeds within.

