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ROCKY GAP, ALLEGANY COUNTY.
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soothing that savage itch {statewide}

Regarding poison ivy, the old saying, "Leaves of three, let them be," can be easier to remember than to put into practice. This three-leaved terror often hides among less noxious vines and greenery, making it difficult to detect when walking or weeding. And even if you avoid touching it, the juice from the plant can be transferred to the skin via contaminated clothing, tools, and pet hair at any time of the year. For sensitive people, just a tiny exposure can trigger a severe allergic reaction.

But for those who know where to find it, poison ivy's neighbor, jewelweed (*impatiens capensis*), may offer an antidote. The cure literally does grow close to the poison: Jewelweed is a prolific annual woodland plant that grows in many areas where poison ivy is found and ground moisture is high—along the banks of ponds and streams, in ditches, and even in sandy beach areas. Plants grow three to five feet tall, and are characterized by oval, round-toothed leaves atop semi-succulent stems, which become hollow and woody near the base of older plants.

In Maryland, jewelweed grows from May until the first frost; it blooms in late summer to produce delicate, lady-slipper-type spotted flowers that range from pale yellow (*impatiens pallida*) to orange (*impatiens biflora*). The term "jewelweed" comes from an unusual characteristic of the plant's leaves: Tiny hairs on the surface trap air and give leaves submerged in water a silver-coated appearance. When it rains, the silvery droplets resemble jewels.



vital stats {maryland blue crab}

3 YEARS — AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF THE BLUE CRAB. / 9 INCHES — LARGEST RECORDED CRAB CAUGHT IN MARYLAND. / \$15 —

BY JACQUELINE M. DUDA



Apryl Parcher

The Jewelweed Bloom

The curative magic of jewelweed lies in its juicy stems, which can be crushed and applied directly to the skin. Various Native American tribes used it to relieve not only itchy poison ivy, but also stinging nettle, insect bites, eczema, and even ringworm and athlete's foot. The key to the cure, though, is speed. If plant juice is smeared on the skin immediately after known exposure to poison ivy or poison oak, the rash can sometimes be avoided altogether.

Once you learn to recognize it, jewelweed can be easily spotted along just about any Maryland roadside or waterway. Besides being able to take advantage of its curative properties, an added benefit of teaching your kids to recognize the plant is that they can have extra fun "catching" the seeds.

When the pods are ripe, they "explode" when touched and release tiny, edible, walnut-flavored seeds. It's those exploding pods, in fact, that gave rise to Jewelweed's other nickname, "Touch-me-not."

-Apryl Parcher



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