The Writings of Eloise Butler

Wild Balsam Occupies Low Places in Wild Gardens; Leaves Shine Like Silver When Put in the Water. - August 20, 1911

Every inch of space on low, moist soil not held firmly by tufted meadow grasses and sedges is occupied by the Wild Balsam (Ref. #1). The smooth, glossy stem has a translucent appearance, and its joints are swollen, affording another proof, of course, that rheumatism is induced by dampness! The leaves are thin and delicate. When dipped in water, their under-surfaces appear to gleam like quicksilver, an appearance due to tiny hairs that catch the water and enmesh air bubbles. The hairs keep the pores that are abundant on the under side of the leaves from being clogged with water. Some water beetles show the same phenomenon when they dive; but, in their case, the air bubbles supply them with the requisite oxygen during the period of immersion.

Spotted Jewelweed, *Impatiens capensis*

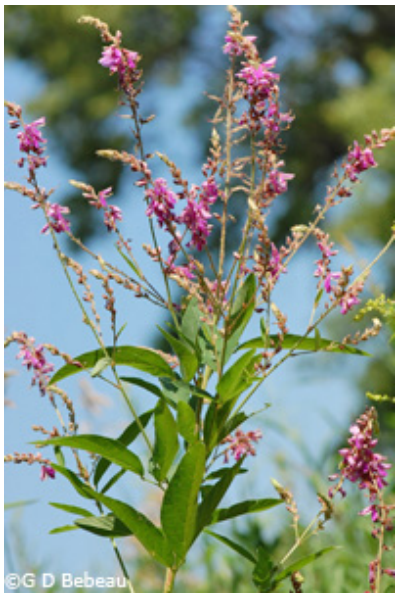
Pale Jewelweed, *Impatiens pallida*.

Little girls are familiar with the plant as Jewelweed. By means of the curved nectar spur, they hook the flowers in their ears and are fine ladies, for the nonce, with gold ear-drops. The most common species of Balsam has flowers usually spotted with brown, of varying shades of orange and yellow, and sometimes pink or white. This is called *Impatiens biflora. I pallida* has larger, pale yellow, often unspotted flowers, with stouter spurs.

The term Impatiens refers to the nature of the seed-vessel, the origin of another common name, touch-me-not. If you gently press the plump, ripe seed-pod between your thumb and forefinger you will be startled by its breaking up into writhing, wormlike pieces, and by the seeds snapping out several feet into space. Many other plants are seed-catapults, among them the violets. If you do not pick your pansies before they go to seed you may lose your eyes some day when leaning over the pansy bed.

Fur-bearing animals are involuntary agents of seed-dispersal. Cows have been seen patiently chewing their cuds with their faces plastered over with "beggars' lice" and their tails festooned with burdock burrs. People are brought into service. You will be busy for some time after a walk in the woods in getting rid of various stick-tights that have taken a free ride attached to your clothing, some even burrowing into the flesh. The tick trefoils (ref #2) will be in the crowd. You will know them by the scalloped pea-pods, covered with small barbed grapplers. When you pull them off, the scallops separate, each one having a single seed. The tick trefoils have, as the name implies, compound leaves

made up of three leaflets. The blossoms are bright purplish pink, clustered in long racemes.



Showy Tick-trefoil (or Canada Tick-trefoi)l *Desmodium canadense*

We stop long to admire the delicate, pure white flowers and splendid leaves of the arrowhead or *sagittaria*, which densely fringes the margins of brooks and ponds. Disappointment will follow if we are tempted to pick them for a bouquet, for the flowers and leaves wither quickly, when detached from their natural element, the water. The print suggests how their beauty might be preserved in decorative designs for leather, metal or wood. [Note that newspaper photo is shown in the pdf of the article] The leaves of *sagittarias* vary greatly in width. Some are very slender and others are without the arrow lobes.

Further east, thickets of tall, leafy Buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis,* abound in the neighborhood swamps. The "buttons" are creamy balls over an inch in diameter, composed of closely packed, small, tubular flowers. A specimen of this interesting plant, with many other species, was shipped from Massachusetts for planting in the wild garden in July of the first year of its founding (Ref. #3). The location of the plant was not recorded, and it was supposed to have died out. The next year another plant was obtained, which produced one blossom the following season, and the next summer a dozen or more blooms.

While admiring these, a random glance perceived a bush some distance within the swamp luminous with starry globes. It was the first buttonbush, all covered with buttons à la mode, which had grown to maturity, undetected in the rank vegetation.

The seed pods of Showy Tick-trefoil as described in the text above.

Buttonbush flower ball, *Cephalanthus occidentalis.*

Broadleaf Arrowhead, *Sagittaria variabilis.*

The buttonbush must not be confused with the Buttonwood [*Platanus occidentalis*], a tree which is also strung with buttons hanging from long, fibrous stems. This tree is [not] (Ref. #4) a native of Minnesota.

It is called also plane tree, because of its smooth bark, which scales off in patches, leaving light-colored spots, as if it were affected with leprosy.

The mature seed pod of London Planetree, *Platanus* X*acerifolia*. See Ref. #4.

It reaches a magnificent growth on the river bottoms of the Middle West, where it is known by another name, the Sycamore. You remember the sobriquet of Senator Vorhees of Indiana - the "Tall Sycamore of the Wabash."

The present season seems favorable to the Wild Onion, *Allium cernuum,* (Ref. #5), for pink balls of fairy grace lifted on slender, leafless stalks give a magical brilliancy to the billowing grasses of large expanses of the prairie. Do not be disconcerted by the name. The onion is, after all, a sort of lily, considered by every one a flower queen, and the odor is not perceptible, except when the plant is bruised. The leaves of this Allium are very narrow, unlike those of the early leek, so abundant in the wood in early spring.

If you should peer under the boughs of a dense plantation of prickly ash in the wild garden, you would see stars - not from being cruelly pricked by the thorns, nor do you see them as a reflection from the sky, but actual stars -geasters, literally, earth-stars - not revolving in space, but grubby, toad-colored bodies attached to the ground. In fact, a species of puffball, with a thick envelope that breaks up when mature into starlike rays reflexed to the ground. Before the rays are formed the geaster looks like a big, dull acorn.

The species photographed is the Collar Earth-star, *Geaster triplex* [now *Geastrum triplex*]. Other species are collarless and in some the spore-bearing part is unstalked. A tiny species has been found at Minnehaha, about the size of a pea. The edibility of the earth-stars has not been tested.

Collar Earth-star, *Geastrum triplex*, Photo ©Michael Kuo.

Nodding Wild Onion, *Allium cernuum*

Tours to the Garden. The following was also printed at the beginning of the text.
Miss Butler will conduct parties through the Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, Tuesday and Thursday mornings, meeting them at the terminus of the Fourth avenue south and Sixth avenue north Street Railway, Sixth avenue and Russell avenue, at 10 o'clock; also Saturday & Sunday afternoons, meeting then at 2:30 o'clock at the same place. One hour later on the same days, persons coming by automobile or carriage will be met at the entrance to the Garden, on the boulevard, at a point northeast of Birch Pond in Glenwood Park. To reach Birch Pond, turn in at the left on Western Avenue where the Park Boulevard intersects the avenue. Phone - T. S. Calhoun 1021; N. W. Main 4295.

Notes:

1. Wild Balsam. As Eloise explains further on, this is a common name at that time for Jewelweed. "Wild Balsam" is derived from the Latin family name for the species, BALSAMINACEAE and in English as the Touch-me-not Family. The name Jewelweed is more commonly in use today in the United States. The current botanical classification of the two species is *Impatiens capensis* Meerb. for the Spotted Jewelweed (Formerly *I. biflora*) and *Impatiens pallida* for the Pale Jewelweed.

2. There are two tick trefoils extant in the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden today: Showy Tick-trefoil (or Canada Tick-trefoil) *Desmodium canadense*; and Pointed-leaved Tick-trefoil, *Desmodium glutinosum*.

3. The first plant was obtained from Malden MA and planted on July 2, 1907. The plant could have been collected in Minnesota as it is native, but its range is restricted to the counties on the eastern edge of the State from Pine in the north to Houston in the south, Goodhue excepted.

4. *Platanus occidentalis*. The western most range of this tree is Iowa and its northern range almost reaches southern Minnesota. A hybrid of this tree and the Oriental Planetree of Europe, *Platanus orientalis*, and named London Planetree, *Platanus Xacerifolia*, is widely used in parts of the Southwest for landscape planting.

5. *Allium cernuum*. This plants common name is Nodding Wild Onion. The other common wild onion of this area is known as "Prairie Wild Onion" and is *Allium stellatum.* Flowers are similar in structure other than *A. stellatum* flowers are not nodding when in flower but rather held upright resembling stars.

The text of this article, along with photos by Mary Meeker of Earth Stars, Arrowhead, Buttonbush and Wild Onion, was published on Sunday August 20, 1911 in the *Sunday Minneapolis Tribune*. It was one of a series of weekly articles Eloise Butler published in 1911 to help acquaint the public with her newly established Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park Some of the plants she discusses are extant in the Garden today. In brackets within the text, and in the notes, have been added the necessary common name or scientific name, that she did not list in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America* and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota.*

The Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.