

Joe Pye Weed Plants Are Not All the Same

by Lyn Chimera

Recently someone (the MG Newsletter Editor!) asked me about the difference between hollow stem Joe-Pye weed and another variety. Since I was unsure, I did some research which wound up being more interesting than I imagined.

The first interesting fact was that the Joe-Pyes are no longer in the Eupatorium (Bonesets) genus but are now *Eutrochium*. The leaves of the bonesets are opposite and those of the Joe-Pye are whirled. There are 3 common varieties of Jo-Pye-weed native to our area: hollow Joe-Pye, sweet Joe-Pye, and spotted Joe-Pye.

Eutrochium maculatum, spotted Joe-pye weed is perhaps the most common in our area. The flowers on this species are rather flat topped with smaller bunches along the stem. The flower stalks are purple spotted (hence the common name) to purple and often have fine hairs. The leaves are whirled in groups of 3 to 6, usually 4-5.

Eutrochium fistulosum, hollow Joe-Pye weed has whirled leaves that can grow up to 12 inches long in groups of 4-7, usually 6. As the name implies the stem is hollow and green in color. The flowers are somewhat domed in shape. It is the only one of the 3 Joe-Pyes covered here with a hollow stem.

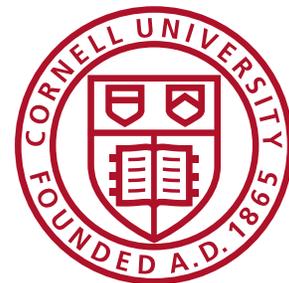
Eutrochium purpureum, sweet Joe-Pye can have a sweet vanilla like aroma. It differs from the other Joe-Pyes in that it prefers some shade. The stems are glabrous (hairless) and thick round and purple green except for where the leaf petioles (leaf stems) occur. There are only 3-4 laves to a whirl.

Joe-Pye weed is such a common plant in ditches and wet areas that we tend to ignore it as a garden plant. Of course, the name "weed" doesn't help. If you have the right conditions, they do make an amazing and easy to grow garden plant especially in a rain garden or wet area. They are all tall (5-7 feet) clump growing plants that really make a statement at the back of the border. Their large showy mauve to pink flowers attract numerous pollinators and the seed heads persist for winter interest and food for birds. They are relatively pest free and the deer don't bother them.

There are 2 varieties growing in my garden and neither is in a particularly moist area. However, I do water during dry periods. My largest clump is the hollow stem variety. It isn't getting the amount of sun it would prefer so I have to stake the clump. It blooms beautifully even with less than full sun and is a buzz with pollinators.



Photo of Joe Pye Weed Pixabay.org



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