

Wildflower in Focus

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Joe-Pye-Weed

Eupatorium spp.

Aster or Daisy Family (*Asteraceae*)



Several species of Joe-Pye-Weed are among the many members of the aster or daisy family to bloom in the mid-Atlantic region during summer and fall. Named for Joe Pye, a man who used the plants medicinally in the 19th century, they provide late-season nectar for butterflies. Look for these tall plants with more or less purplish stalks, whorled leaves, and large terminal clusters of pale to deep purplish-pink flowers blooming along Maryland's rivers, streams and roadsides during the coming weeks.

Specific Characteristics of Maryland's Species of Joe-Pye-Weed

- Hollow Joe-Pye-Weed, *Eupatorium fistulosum* Barratt
- Sweet Joe-Pye-Weed, *E. purpureum* L.
- Three-Nerved Joe-Pye-Weed, *E. dubium* Willd. ex Poir.

Joe-Pye-weeds served as important medicinals for American Indians and early European settlers (see "[Herbal Lore](#)," below). At least three species of Joe-Pye-weed are found in Maryland. Hollow Joe-Pye-weed (*E. fistulosum*) is the most common species, especially west of the Chesapeake Bay, and it is found in moist and upland open fields and meadows; sweet Joe-Pye-weed (*E. purpureum*) is less common and is more often found in moist woodlands, usually along rivers and streams. Three-nerved Joe-Pye-weed (*E. dubium*) is primarily a Coastal Plain species, with limited distribution in the Piedmont. Because the plants are so similar, they are treated together here. See "Species Descriptions" for distinguishing characteristics.

Flower Heads: Tiny, pale to deep purplish-pink disk flowers in heads of 4-10; the heads form large, domed or rounded terminal clusters which are very striking, even from afar, due in part to the plants' considerable height.

Leaves: Opposite, simple, in whorls (*E. fistulosum* usually in whorls of 4-7; *E. purpureum* and *E. dubium*: 2-5, but most often 3 or 4.) Lanceolate, ovate or elliptic, toothed, 2-8" long, on short petioles.

Height: Extremely tall: 3-10'.

Habitat and Range: Moist woods (often bottomlands), thickets, marshes (*E. fistulosum* and *E. dubium* favor the slightly wetter habitats); eastern North America.

Herbal Lore: Joe-Pye-weed species have been used herbally and homeopathically to treat urinary tract and gall bladder problems, rheumatism and a number of other medical conditions. In their **Peterson Field Guides' Eastern/Central**

Medicinal Plants, Steven Foster and James A. Duke say the plants' common name is "derived from 'Joe Pye,' a 19th century Caucasian 'Indian theme promoter' who used the root to induce sweating in typhus fever."

MNPS board members Cris Fleming, Beth Johnson, Karyn Molines, John Parrish, and Rod Simmons contributed to this write-up.

Blooming Time: July-October.

Species Descriptions: Hollow Joe-Pye-weed (*E. fistulosum*) has a purplish, glaucous plant stalk that is hollow or tubed in cross section (but please do not break the plant to look for this feature). Sweet Joe-Pye-weed (*E. purpureum*) usually has a solid or mostly solid plant stalk that is slightly glaucous, but usually purple only at the leaf nodes. Sweet Joe-Pye-weed leaves or stalks may exude a vanilla scent when crushed (but don't crush stalk). Its flower heads are very pale pink, purple or cream. Three-nerved Joe-Pye-weed (*E. dubium*) has a purple-speckled stalk and deep purple flower clusters which are smaller and less domed than the previous two species. A fourth species, which is common farther north and grows in higher elevations to the west and southwest, is spotted Joe-Pye-weed (*E. maculatum*). It has a more flat-topped (less domed) flower cluster and a purple or purple-spotted stalk that is rarely glaucous. According to botanists Cris Fleming and John Parrish, spotted Joe-Pye-weed may no longer grow in Maryland and is officially listed as extirpated from the state.

Locations for Hollow, Sweet, and Three-Nerved Joe-Pye-Weed: Statewide including Adkins Arboretum; Jug Bay (visible while canoeing the marsh channels, along with New York ironweed and swamp milkweed); Sugarloaf Mountain wetlands near western slopes; Rock Creek Regional Park; Little Bennett Regional Park; Gunpowder Falls State Park. See **Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area** (Fleming, Lobstein and Tufty) and **Herbaceous Plants of Maryland** (Brown and Brown) for more information.

"Wildflower in Focus" text adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press).