

Shore Flowers Produce Colorful Border at Water's Edge



Nature Notes

By Patricia Martin



A couple of weeks ago, some folks from the Weather Channel called and said that they were coming to the Island to do a story, and thought it would be nice to include a segment on wild flowers of Mackinac. When I think of Mackinac wild flowers that are particularly impressive, I think of the spring ephemerals that bloom in the hardwoods in May and June, like the large flowered trillium, the trout lily, and the yellow lady's slipper. This is midsummer, and a hot one at that, and I was trying to think of wild flowers that might be particularly impressive, or at least give a mass of color. Certainly there are not a lot of colorful flowers in the woods right now, but as I biked around the Island, I noticed some of the shore flowers were in bloom. As I slowed down and

stopped beside some purple/magenta-colored flowers below Arch Rock, I realized that they were not fireweed or great willow-herb (*Epilobium angustifolium*), as I had first thought. They were, in fact, a related species known as great hairy willow-herb (*E. hirsutum*).

The willow-herbs all share a number of characteristics. They have four petals that are violet, magenta pink, or white. They produce a slender capsule with many seeds, and the seeds usually have a tuft of long hair (coma) at the summit. Their name, *Epilobium*, comes from the Greek *epi*, which means upon, *lobon*, meaning a capsule, from the fact that the flower sepals and petals (perianth) surmount the capsule. The petals are generally notched at the tip, or at least

indented, and the flowers are found in the upper axils of the leaves. Herb-willows are in the evening primrose family (*Onagracea*). An evening primrose was blooming right beside the great hairy willow-herb on the shore.

Now we have a number of willow-herbs on Mackinac, the most common of which is probably the fireweed, which grows in dry wood, fields, roadsides, rocky ground clearings, and upper shores, and, in general, in disturbed areas. As their name suggests, they thrive in burned-over areas. And they're circumpolar; in fact, they're considered one of the most circumpolar of all plants, as they grow around the world in northern latitudes. Fireweed has alternate leaves, which are smooth on the edges, or at most, minutely toothed. The leaves are lance-shaped and paler on the lower surface. The entire plant stands two to eight feet in height, and is topped with large (3/4 to 1-inch wide) magenta flowers in a long, spike-like raceme.

Contrast this plant with the one I found, the great hairy willow-herb. The hairy willow-herb has generally oppositely-arranged leaves that are sharply toothed. The leaves are lance-shaped. The stem is stout, hairy, and branched. The plant also grows two to six feet tall, and has rose purple-colored petals and the flower is an inch in diameter. It grows in marshes, swamps, wet fields, and thickets, at the borders of rivers and moist



Water Speedwell

woods, and on shores. This plant is a Eurasian species, which first appeared in Michigan in 1943 in Kalamazoo County. According to Voss's Michigan Flora, it's a well established species from New England to Michigan, but in his map, he indicates sites only in the Lower Peninsula, and not in the Upper Peninsula. I went back to my thesis, and I had not collected this plant when I did my study (I finished my study in 1995). I think this is one of the invasive species that has since moved onto the Island.

Near the great hairy willow-herb were a number of other plants, including some I have written about before. Jewelweed, also known as spotted touch-me-not, was growing in profusion. This is a wonderful plant, whose sap is good for easing skin irritations like poison ivy or stinging nettles. Herb Robert, one of our wild geraniums, was growing, as were some cattails. Clustered in and among all these plants was a speedwell (*Veronica*), which I don't think I've ever mentioned before.

Many of us are familiar with the speedwells that grow in lawns or gardens. With their blue or violet small flowers (1/8 to 1/2 inches wide) and four petals, one of which is smaller than the others, they often run along the ground. The speedwell that I saw



Great Hairy Herb

by the lake was much taller, one to three feet tall, with opposite leaves that have no petiole and seem to almost clasp the stem. The leaves were egg-shape, or slightly lance-shaped. The stems are erect and spreading, and the flowers are blue/violet. What I found is what is called water speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*). It is found in wet, sandy, muddy shores and ditches, especially in springy places, and blooms in late spring to early fall. It is quite similar to American brooklime (*V. Americana*), which is more common in general, but whose leaves are short-stalked (have petioles).

It was great fun to find these plants, and to see how many others are blooming this time of year. Keep your eyes open for these and all the other wonderful plants of Mackinac.

P.S. Speaking of plants, two of our favorite wood plants have just come up. Pinesap (*Monotropa hypopitys*), a parasite of pine or oak woods from the pyrola family, has been up for a couple of weeks, and its cousin, Indian pipe (*M. uniflora*), was sighted Sunday, July 29.

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