

## Magical Enchanter's Nightshade

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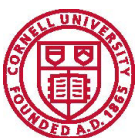


At the junction of irony and unbridled fear and evil stands what can be considered a judgement call: the weed. I prefer calling it a wildflower.

It appears stealthily. At the edge of the garden bed we stand, iNaturalist as our sole arm, deciphering leaf size and arrangement, stem and—if we are timely—the flower.

What is this? Does it belong? Is it not essentially wild, grounds for chaos, an anomaly, to be banned from the *hortus conclusus*, the solidly designed purposeful garden? Certainty is not always on the menu; nature resists being classified. What am I really seeing?

In the case of *Circaea canadensis*, syn. *C. lutetiana* ssp. *canadensis* (Eastern Enchanter's Nightshade), we see daintiness in its inflorescence, almost mystical in its appearance, resolute in its behavior, irrepressible in its propagation efforts: its tiny seed carrying burrs will remain attached to your clothing or your pet's fur, and the plant will also propagate via rhizomes for good measure.



The Enchanter's Nightshade has a predilection for wooded areas, better yet, riparian ones, bathing in dappled light to full shade, and yes, sometimes your north exposed garden. Strolling in the forest during the month of June, now that you know it, you might notice its unassuming colonies of elongated spike-like structures crowned with white two lobed petals. The flowers are tiny and numerous (two petals, two sepals) - floating atop opposing oval leaves rounded at the base. Strolling later in the season, you may not notice it at all, until you find its numerous burrs aught in your knitted garments.

To really appreciate the beauty of this flower, you might need a hand lens, unless you are a hover fly—its devoted pollinator—in which case you'll be more interested in accessing its nectar from the downward-facing flower.



Although called “Enchanter's Nightshade” the plant carries only an aura of possibilities, but no poison. It belongs to the *Onagraceae* family along with evening primrose. The



genus name *Circaeae* is derived from Circe, the Greek goddess of sorcery (Pharmakaea), daughter of Helios, the sun god, and of the ocean nymph Perse. Skilled in the matter of transmutations and illusions, Circe used potions and incantations - apparently employing plants such as the Enchanter's Nightshade - to change Odysseus's companions into swine.

The species name *lutetiana* alludes to the Latin name of Paris - Lutetia - sometimes known as the Witch City, a reference to the many witch trials held there in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Failing to discipline the Enchanter's Nightshade could become a curse of its own but remember that *Circaea lutetiana* is one of the only native plants flowering in the summer shade, as source of food for flies and small bees and an integral part of our ecosystems

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