

## DECEMBER 2020 PLANT OF THE MONTH

### Moneywort, *Lysimachia nummularia*

Moneywort or creeping jenny is a fast-growing ground cover in the Primrose family. While it is native to Europe and temperate Asia, it is considered invasive in several US states. Several cultivars of this evergreen perennial are commonly available in nurseries and big box stores here in Ohio as a potting or landscaping accent. The plant has opposite yellowish green to dark green leaves and small, yellow flowers that bloom throughout the summer. It is a low-growing herb that is often no more than 2-3" tall. The plant consists of long, trailing vines running across the surface of the ground that branch frequently and commonly form roots at the nodes. It grows in full sun to full shade, but prefers shaded areas with moist to wet soils, making it a common invader of Ohio's wetland habitats.

This species is an old European garden plant with many common names. Linnaeus assigned the epithet "nummularia", which translates from Latin as "resembling a coin," a reference to the plants consistently round leaves. In England, the plant is referred to as "Twopence", however moneywort seemed a better choice on this side of the Atlantic. Here in the US, Creeping Jenny seems to be the most commonly used name in the nursery trade. While we are not sure why it is called Creeping Jenny, it turns out that this little herb was first grown as an herbal remedy in Europe. According to Gerrard's Herbal of the early 17th century, "The herbe boiled in wine with a little honie, or meade, prevaieth much against the cough in children, called chinne cough." The "chinne cough" to which he refers is what we know as whooping cough. It wouldn't be much of a stretch to imagine "creeping chenny" changing to "creeping Jenny" as the old word for the disease fell into disuse.

While moneywort has not yet been evaluated by the OIPC Assessment Team, it is on the list for the upcoming round of assessments in 2021. This species is now common throughout Ohio and has spread far beyond landscaped areas where it was planted as a ground cover. We often see it invading wet habitats by solidly covering the ground, eliminating space for native species. The plant is highly adaptable, occurring not only in low quality wetland habitats such as roadside ditches, but appearing as a primary component of remote, high quality habitats such as wet meadows, swamps, floodplain forests, stream banks, bogs, and other wet habitats. The plant is difficult to control as it can reproduce vegetatively from very small pieces of stem that are easily broken from the main plant. Flowers produce only a few small seeds, but the sheer volume of seeds produced can overwhelm efforts to control its spread. Clearly, effective dispersal vectors exist that introduce this species to far-reaching habitats throughout Ohio and the eastern US. We hope to evaluate this plant in the coming season to provide informative control methodologies and legislative guidance to restrict the spread of this invader.

Written by Gary Conley and Jennifer Windus, OIPC Board



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