



Spiranthes laciniata, lace-lipped ladies' tresses, blooms at the onset of the summer rainy season, often in several inches of water. The genus name *Spiranthes* means "coiled flowers," aptly named as this specimen illustrates.



Sometimes, the spiral of flowers on the inflorescence of *Spiranthes laciniata* is very loose, making it appear as though they are all on one side of the stem.

laciniata, the lace-lipped ladies tresses. A near twin of the earlier flowering *Spiranthes vernalis*, in South Florida, *Spiranthes laciniata* blooms from late May through early July, the same time as *Platanthera nivea*. Like the snowy orchid, *Spiranthes laciniata* inhabits open glades and roadside swales. And, like the snowy orchid, its bloom stems emerge from the water that has been dumped on the land by the first deluges of the rainy season.

Although a few rare plants of *Spiranthes laciniata* have been measured to more than three feet tall, most are much smaller. At the tip of a wiry inflorescence, the tubular, yellowish-white flowers demonstrate the spiral arrangement which gives the whole genus its name. *Spiranthes* means "coiled flowers."

The blossoms of *Spiranthes laciniata* demonstrate varying degrees of spiraling. Most often, they are rather loosely spiraled around the stem, sometimes so much so that they appear to be all on one side of the inflorescence. This one-sided (or secund) arrangement gives the impression of a small toothbrush. However, tightly spiraled inflorescences also occur. The flowers of *Spiranthes laciniata* are much smaller than those of *Spiranthes odorata* and are more typical in size for the genus.

These four species are the most notable of our aquatic orchids. But other orchid species also have adapted to Florida's wetland habitats. In the sloughs and pond apple swamps of the Big Cypress and, especially, in the Fakahatchee Strand, it's not unusual to see normally terrestrial orchid species growing on tree bases, cypress knees, and floating logs, where their roots may be inundated for varying periods of the year. Species observed under these very wet conditions include *Bletia purpurea*, *Habenaria odontopetala*, *Liparis nervosa*, *Malaxis spicata*, *Platythelys querceticola*, and *Ponthieva racemosa*. The acquired aquatic lifestyle of all these orchids is a testament to the adaptability of this fascinating family of flowering plants.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Chuck McCartney is a third-generation South Floridian and copy editor with the Broward edition of The Miami Herald. He has been fascinated by orchids since childhood and has written extensively about orchids for a variety of publications. Thank goodness he writes for us.

Champion Lyonia Discovered in Central Florida

Report from the
Tarflower Chapter FNPS

On May 23, 1998, Mary Keim was on an Orange Audubon Society field trip at the Seminole Ranch Conservation Area near Christmas, Orange County, when she saw what looked like the largest rusty lyonia (*Lyonia ferruginea*) that she had ever seen. Mary immediately brought her discovery to the attention of fellow field-tripper Randy Snyder, and the two alertly took measurements of the tree in the manner prescribed by the Florida Division of Forestry for determining Florida champion trees (this is described also in Dan Ward's book, *Big Trees: the Florida Register*, published by and available from FNPS Subtropical Trader. To their surprise, the tree's measurements, which included a circumference of the trunk of 35 inches, made it the largest rusty lyonia ever recorded in Florida or the U.S.

Mary and Randy asked fellow members of the Tarflower Chapter to verify their measurements and identification of the tree. On Saturday morning, June 20, 1998, a team of crack FNPS naturalists joined Mary and Randy at the conservation area to inspect Mary's historic discovery. After an hour and a half of minute examination, detailed measurements, countless photographs, exhaustive review of scientific literature, and intense debate, the team concluded unanimously that the tree is a rusty lyonia and according to Ward's register, does appear to be the largest ever recorded.

Mary and Randy formally nominating the tree for Florida and national champion status with the Florida Division of Forestry and the American Forestry Association. If this tree is ultimately conferred champion status, it will be the first and only truly native tree in Orange County ever accorded that distinction.

Congratulations to Mary, Randy, and the Tarflower Chapter for your discovery! ✨