

## Native Orchid of the Month—January

### *Zeuxine strateumatica* Soldier's orchid

*Zeuxine strateumatica* (Soldier's orchid) is a small orchid native to Asia, known from China to India, including Southeast Asia and adjacent islands. It was originally described in 1753; its name was taken from the Greek *strateuma* meaning a band or army, presumably because the little plants can grow in profusion and appear as an army in a grassy field. Introduced into Florida in the 1930s, its range now includes Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.

It flowers from October to January and is found in moist areas in a variety of habitats, including lawns, roadsides, nurseries, and farm fields.



The plant appears with leafy brown stems emerging upright from the base of a dead plant. The leaves number 5 to 12 spirally arranged and clasping the stem. The blades are erect, dark green, linear to narrowly lance-like. The flower bracts are whitish-green and lance-like in form. The three petals are whitish with prominent yellow lip.

It sometimes takes years for the new plants to grow. In areas where the plant is well established it can be quite attractive despite the fact that the plants only grow to about 4 inches tall.

The orchid is a 'here-now, gone-tomorrow' plant. It emerges in winter, blooms from October to January and within a few weeks it vanishes. The following year it may or may not return.

Given the weedy nature of these plants and their spontaneous appearance in a given location, it likely has internal self-fertilization or a mingling of sexual and nonsexual reproduction. Very abnormal, indeed.

