

## Native Orchid of the Month—December

### *Spiranthes longilabris* (giantspiral lady's tresses)

*Spiranthes longilabris* (giantspiral lady's tresses) is an uncommon orchid and one of the last to bloom in any given year—October through December. It is found primarily on Gulf Coastal Plain in dry to moist meadows, pine flatwoods and savannas, fields, roadsides. Usually at this point, all the surrounding grasses have dried to a deep straw brown, leaving this orchid as one of the few green herbaceous plants remaining.

Plants are up to 12 inches tall and will have one or more grass-like leaves clinging to the base of the flowering stem, which usually bears the flowers in a rather lax spiral.



The flowers themselves are one of the larger flowers in the genus *Spiranthes*, with sepals that usually spread widely with a long, lacy lip held lowermost.

The usually 3 to 5 deciduous leaves persist through flowering, and are reduced to sheathing bracts upward on stem. Inflorescences are loosely to tightly spiraled, with usually 5 to 9 flowers per cycle of spiral. Flowers are mostly horizontal, strongly gaping, white to cream; lateral sepals are centrally yellow.



This species is seldom seen in the wild, although suitable habitat exists. This is likely because of the combination of relative rarity and the late blooming season.

