

Native Orchid of the Month—December

*Bletilla striata*  
(urn orchid)

*Bletilla striata* (urn orchid) is an introduced species from China and Japan. It is a terrestrial orchid, also called the Chinese ground orchid, which is commonly sold across the lower South for planting in flower gardens.

It produces small pinkish-purple flowers up to 1.5 inches long in 3 to 7 flowering racemes. It blooms mid to late spring with each pseudobulb producing 3 to 5, linear, pleated, papery-textured, sword-shaped, pale green leaves



that extend to 18 inches long. The pseudobulbs resemble spreading corms that usually occur at ground level. They spread slowly and eventually form clumps of considerable size.

The flowers occur in an alternating pattern along their length and open sequentially, yet several are in flower at any given time. The flower stalks start out in a vertical position,

but as more flowers open, they tend to sag down and become horizontal to the ground. The foliage dies to the ground in the winter. *Bletilla striata* grows best in moist-to-damp soils exposed to 1 to 6 hours of sun.

Propagation is by dividing large clumps in late summer and early fall.

Although *Bletilla* has not been formally documented in the state as a native plant, it is easy to grow and has been widely distributed by gardeners and other interested in growing terrestrial orchids around their homes.

