

Native Orchid of the Month—February

Spiranthes brevilabris
(Texas lady's tresses)

Spiranthes brevilabris (Texas lady's tresses) is a perennial herb with a basal rosette of overwintering leaves. The leaves usually persist through flowering, usually 3 to 5, yellowish green, and spreading around the stem.

The flower stalk is up to 16 inches tall, with several sheathing bracts; a single row of 35 or fewer, yellowish flowers spiral around the stem with 8 to 10 flowers per cycle around the flower stalk.



The flowers are about ¼ inch long, yellowish-white, and very hairy; the 2 petals and 3 sepals are similar in size and shape and curve forward; the lip petal curves slightly downward, with a yellow center and a wavy or fringed edge.

Flowering occurs from February through April and its habitat is frequently burned pine savannas and flatwoods, roadsides and cemeteries. Habitat loss has brought this species to the brink of extinction.

Texas lady's tresses have been reported in Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, and east Texas. Only two populations of this species are currently known—north Florida and east Texas. The Texas population was rediscovered in 2007.

Recent studies suggest that *S. brevilabris* has a high degree of mycobiont specificity under which seed germination occurs. This high specificity of a fungal symbiotic relationship may be related to the rare status of the species.

