

Native Orchid of the Month—April

Cleistes bifaria (small, spreading pogonia)

Cleistes bifaria (small, spreading pogonia) is a very stately orchid, bearing a single vanilla-scented flower almost two inches in diameter on a tall solitary stem. One leaf grows midway up the stem and another bract grows beneath the flower. The entire plant is coated with a fine, plum-like frosting that makes it relatively easy to see plants out of bloom.

C. bifaria has an underground network of spreading fibrous roots. It is found in small clusters of single flowering stems, each with a single leaf blade about halfway up the 12- to 18-inch stem. A smaller floral bract clasps around the base of the flower and appears as a second smaller leaf blade. The flower has three brown-green sepals spreading upward from the stem. Two upper petals and a lip below form the flower tube.



The two petals are similar and range in color from white to a light rose-pink, ending with a slight curl at their tips. The lip is more darkly colored, bearing a plateau-like crest edged in rose and spotted on its upper surface and a slightly ragged edge. Rose, green, and brown colored veins snake throughout the lip.

This orchid is encountered infrequently in savannas,

meadows, openings woodlands, where the soil is acidic and moist and made up of rotting pine or other organic material. It flowers April through May, but is never very common.

