

Native Orchid of the Month—July

Platanthera ciliaris (yellow fringed orchid)

Yellow fringed orchid (*Platanthera ciliaris*) is a large and showy species. It grows in "acid soil of hillside seepage bogs" in the longleaf pine landscapes of the Gulf Coast. Like many species in these habitats, including flatwoods, it is dependent upon recurring fire to create open conditions. Further north it is found in bogs, but even there it may be dependent upon fire to create open conditions.



Plants may be to 36 inches tall with a raceme of up to fifty flowers, each about 1 inch from dorsal sepal to the end of the lip. The flowers are borne in a cluster at the top of the plant that can be six inches tall. Flowers are apricot to orange in color, heavily fringed on the lip and bearing a spur at the back of the lip filled with nectar at the very tip.

The split anther (an uncommon structure among orchids) spreads to either side of the orifice, which leads to a slender spur filled with nectar in the last centimeter or so. Butterflies are the chief pollinator of this orchid,

having to extend their tongues down the spur to drink the nectar.

Flowering occurs from June through September (peaking in August).

Seedlings will produce a single leaf, or perhaps a few leaves in a basal rosette. The leaves, light, almost bluish-green with several prominent veins, start out at the base of the plant and may be of good size (in some cases 12 inches long), and then rapidly decrease in size to mere floral bracts as they clasp higher up the fluted stem.

