

CORALLORHIZA WISTERIANA Conrad
Spring Coral-root

FAMILY: Orchidaceae.

HABIT: Herbaceous perennial, 1-4.5 dm. high; flowering mid April-mid May.

SIMILAR SPECIES: This species and the equally rare *C. trifida* (Early Coral-root) are very similar and bloom at the same time. However, *C. wisteriana* has brightly colored flowers and is found only in southern Ohio while *C. trifida* has pale flowers and is known only from northeast Ohio. These two species are the only spring-blooming coral- roots in the state.

TOTAL RANGE: PA and s. NJ to FL, w. to se. NE, OK, and TX, and in the w. cordillera.

STATE RANGE (as of 2008): Post-1980 records are from Adams, Athens, Brown, Clermont, Hamilton, Lawrence, Scioto, and Warren Counties. Pre-1980 records are from Fairfield, Gallia, Highland, Montgomery, Ross, and Washington Counties.

HABITAT: In semi-shade in a variety of mesic deciduous woods.

HAZARDS: Drying and compaction of the forest floor; like most coral-roots, it is sensitive to soil disturbance because of its relationship with mycorrhizal fungi (see Comments).

RECOVERY POTENTIAL: Probably very poor, judging from the great disparity between its present-day and pre-1960 distribution in the state.

INVENTORY GUIDELINES: Flower stalks only should be collected; rhizomes should be left in the soil.

COMMENTS: This genus lives for most of its life as an underground saprophyte. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship of this genus with mycorrhizal fungi that enwrap the rhizome. Thus, coral-roots are nearly impossible to cultivate or to transplant and are very sensitive to soil disturbance. Individual plants do not bloom every year. Long periods may pass between blooming. An abundance of flowers may be found one year; another year, merely a few flower stalks; yet other years no flowers at all are produced. The underground rhizomes, though, still persist in a semi-dormant state all this time. Flowering appears to be triggered by a combination of natural factors, such as air temperature, soil moisture, and photoperiod, as yet poorly understood. Because of its early blooming time and its inconspicuous appearance, this species easily may be overlooked. Therefore, it should be sought elsewhere in southern Ohio.

The general habitat is not rare and it formerly occurred over much of that region. It may be more frequent than the present data indicates.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

Case, F.W., Jr. 1964. Orchids of the western Great Lakes region. Cranbrook Institute of Science Bull. No. 48, Bloomfield Hills, MI. 147 p.

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