

HEXALECTRIS SPICATA (Walter) Barnhart
Crested Coral-root

FAMILY: Orchidaceae

HABIT: Herbaceous perennial, 2-9 dm.; flowering late July-mid August.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Superficially all coral-roots are similar. *Hexalectris*, though, is much larger in size and has more vividly colored flowers than any member of the genus *Corallorhiza*. Except for rare albino individuals, Crested Coral-root flowers are striped, while all other coral-roots have flowers of mottled or uniform coloration.

TOTAL RANGE: MD to OH and MO, s. to FL and Mexico.

STATE RANGE (as of 2008): Post-1980 records are from Adams, Lawrence, and Pike counties.

HABITAT: In semi-shade in well-drained woodlands, often in mixed oak communities; has been reported both from acid and alkaline soils.

HAZARDS: Because of its relationship with symbiotic fungi (see Comments), it is sensitive to soil disturbance and compaction.

RECOVERY POTENTIAL: Probably very low because of its fungal relationship (see Comments), it is difficult to transplant.

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

COMMENTS: The life history of *Hexalectris* is similar to that of other coral-roots. Its large, branching rhizomes are enwrapped in mycorrhizal fungi with which the orchid has an obscure symbiotic relationship. These rhizomes persist for many years, but seldom produce flower stalks. Blooming seems to be heaviest during wet summers, but the inter-relationship of environmental factors with anthesis is not understood. In some years, only a few flower stalks can be found; at times, there is a very profuse blooming; other years, no stalks at all are produced. Thus it is difficult to assess the health of any population of this orchid, since the majority of plants in any area are underground and not visible.

When in bloom, this species is most conspicuous and one of the showiest of Ohio's wildflowers. Because of the unusual life history, it may be more frequent than generally believed. It should be sought throughout extreme southern Ohio. The Shawnee Forest area in particular provides abundant habitat.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

Gleason, H.A., and A. Cronquist. 1991. Manual of vascular plants of northeastern United States and adjacent Canada. New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York. 910 pp.

Luer, C.A. 1975. The native orchids of the United States and Canada excluding Florida. New York Botanical Garden, New York, NY. 361 p.

Sheviak, C.J. 1974. An introduction to the ecology of the Illinois Orchidaceae. Illinois State Museum, Springfield, IL. 90 p.



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