

POLYGALA PAUCIFOLIA Willd.
Gaywings

FAMILY: Polygalaceae

HABIT: Perennial herb to 15 cm.; flowering May, June; fruiting June-September.

SIMILAR SPECIES: The distinctive, attractive flowers of this species make it unmistakable in flower. Non-flowering plants resemble the common wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*), a species with thicker, more odorous leaves than *Polygala*.

TOTAL RANGE: Que. and N.B. to Sask., s. to CT, NY, and WI, and in the mountains to GA.

STATE RANGE (as of 2008): Post-1980 records are from Lucas County.

HABITAT: Shaded to semi-open situations in mesic, deciduous, or coniferous woods; often associated with hemlock.

HAZARDS: Opening of forest canopy and soil disturbance from logging operations.

RECOVERY POTENTIAL: Unknown, but presumed poor as it seems to be very sensitive to soil disturbance.

INVENTORY GUIDELINES: Only the aboveground parts of a flowering specimen should be taken. A collection should be made only if the local population is large enough to withstand the taking of a plant.

COMMENTS: This beautiful milkwort is one of Ohio's most distinctive wildflowers. When in flower it is difficult to overlook or misidentify. Non-flowering specimens, however, blend into the general background of the forest floor and may be difficult to spot. Its general state range may be accurately known. In fact, it is unclear if the reported populations are still extant. However, La Frankie (1983) states that *P. paucifolia* can spread by sending out rhizomes from small perennial tubers. These rhizomes can in turn produce new tubers. In this manner the plant can spread vegetatively or persist at a site where it has not been readily evident for years. This species should be sought in appropriate habitats throughout the state.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

Cooperrider, T.S. 1995. The Dicotyledoneae of Ohio. Part 2. Linaceae through Campanulaceae. Ohio State Univ. Press, Columbus, OH. 656 pp.

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.

La Frankie, J.V., Jr. 1983. A note on the growth habit of fringed polygala. *Rhodora* 85: 457-460.

Miller, N.G. 1971. The Polygalaceae in the southeastern United States. *J. Arn. Arb.* 52: 267-284.



Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Division of Natural Areas and Preserves

Created: 1/1984 James F. Burns