

Orchid Conservation and You

The main threat to orchid survival is the wholesale destruction of their natural habitat. Orchid habitat is being rapidly consumed by deforestation, agriculture, industry and development. Many orchids that once grew freely in nature have all but disappeared outside of cultivation. Orchid hobbyists and growers may be the best hope of preserving some endangered orchids.

Conservation Strategies

Ex Situ Conservation

Because of the rapid, widespread devastation of natural orchid habitat, ex-situ orchid cultivation is essential in maintaining orchid survival and biodiversity. Orchids grown in houses, laboratories and greenhouses are ex situ (literally “out of place”).

Any orchid grower can play a part in preserving these plants. The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society works to preserve and protect orchids, primarily by fostering the propagation, sharing, care and protection of orchids cultivated ex-situ by volunteer growers. We are aware of orchid plants which have been cared for by various The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society members and maintained continuously over the course of more than 40 years.

The more locations where an ex situ plant is kept, the more likely it will be to survive various environmental catastrophes (hurricanes, tsunamis, tornados, floods, landslides, earthquakes, etc.) that can happen in one location or another. The more people who learn how to care for orchids, the more places there are that just might mean the difference between surviving and disappearing from the face of the earth.

The Orchid Conservation Coalition describes its Living Orchid Collection on its website, <http://www.livingorchidcollection.org/>. Anyone can participate in their program. It could also be possible to coordinate a more regional collection among close-by societies.

The plants most in need of preservation are the species. While some species can be harder to care for than hybrids, they may be more at risk of disappearing. Some of them are impressive plants, but others range from nondescript to unimpressive. While there is nothing wrong with a 6-inch polka-dot, striped-fringed-five-colored, 4 foot spike of fragrant blossoms, maybe the plainer Janes are a more subtle, refined acquired taste. If you have to have all that pizzazz, then go for them both. Preserving species would permit re-making desirable hybrids.

If you keep some orchids in your collection out of a desire to participate in their conservation, it is important to consider how much backup you may need for heat, electricity and water in the event that these utilities are interrupted at the wrong time of year. It is also advisable to have a backup person to care for the orchids in the event you are called away from them for an

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extended period. Your family should know who they can turn to for help in the event you are incapacitated or you suddenly die. **In Situ Conservation**

There are efforts underway in many countries to save their indigenous orchids. This work may be done by the equivalent of a non-profit. Some conservation projects are in private preserves and collections. It is important to know what will happen to the orchids and land when the present owner no longer controls them. Some conservation is sponsored by U.S. entities. A list is available at: <http://www.orchidconservationcoalition.org/conservationorgs.html> Some conservation programs and preserves offer ecotourism, events, and opportunities to participate in or support their work. Orchids growing in situ may not be collected. Importing orchids gathered from the wild violates CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).

Research

Several researchers have research programs that will help us learn more about how to conserve orchids. The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society has supported the University of Florida Tropical Research and Education Center.

Local/Regional Native Orchids

Many areas work to preserve native orchids, sometimes re-introducing them. Unfortunately, native orchids often must be protected from grazing livestock, and especially from grazing deer. Some orchids originally found in our region are completely gone. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources identifies endangered orchids in our region as:

Hamilton County	Spiranthes ovalis (Lesser Ladies' Tresses) Triphora trianthophora (Three-birds orchid)
Warren County	Triphora trianthophora (Three-birds orchid)
Butler County	Spiranthes ovalis (Lesser Ladies' Tresses)
Clermont & Brown Counties	None listed
Adams County	Cypripedium candidum (White Lady's Slipper) Platanthera ciliaris (Yellow Fringed Orchid) Platanthera flava (Tuberclad Rein Orchid) Spiranthes lucida (Shining Ladies' Tresses) Spiranthes magnicamporum (Great Plains Ladies' Tresses) Spiranthes ovalis (Lesser Ladies' Tresses); Triphora trianthophora (Three-birds orchid)

Protecting Orchid Habitat

Unnecessary consumption of resources and high carbon output increase the pressure on the environments that support orchids. Reducing your own impact is a first step. Paper products, disposables, petroleum products, and wood harvested from tropical forests are good targets.

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Choosing electronic documents over paper and managing home and greenhouse energy consumption are also good ways to make a difference. In addition, there are nonprofit conservation groups that purchase and protect wild areas and orchid habitat around the world.

Orchid Conservation Resources

Growers of Native Plants

Roberts Flower Supply, www.orchidmix.com/cyps.htm has a large number of hardy Cypripediums, some of which are native to the US.

Vermont Ladyslipper Company, www.vtladyslipper.com

Washington Native Orchid Society, www.wanativeorchids.com/nativeorchidgrowers.html

Wild Orchid Company, www.wildorchidcompany.com/ has excellent materials on growing hardy orchids.

Web Sites

General:

Native Orchid Preservation and Education Society;

<https://nativeorchidpreservationeducationandsociety.com>

The Orchid Conservation Coalition; <http://www.OrchidConservationCoalition.org/>

Orchid Conservation Alliance; <http://www.OrchidConservationAlliance.org/>

Orchid Conservation International; <http://www.OrchidConservation.org/>

Native Orchids:

Native Orchid Conservation; <http://www.NativeOrchid.org/>

Native Orchid Conference; <http://www.NativeOrchidConference.org>

Ohio Department of Natural Resources: <http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/>

Native Orchids of the United States, with a map that lists native orchids by state, at

http://www.orchids.org/ooc/na_orchids/us_orchids_java.shtml

Other Native Plants:

Midwest Native Plant Society; <http://www.CincinnatiBirds.com/mwnp/>

Greater Cincinnati Wild Ones; <http://www.CincinnatiBirds.com/WildOnes/>

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Books & Articles

Eric Hansen, *Orchid Fever: A Horticultural Tale of Love, Lust and Lunacy*. Vintage Books / A Division of Random House, Inc., New York, 2000. ISBN 0-679-77183-2 www.vintagebooks.com

Kate Blair, *The Orchids of Ohio*, The Ohio Naturalist, Dec., 1909
https://kb.osu.edu/dspace/bitstream/1811/1658/1/V10N02_024.pdf

Supporting Conservation in Action

The Conservation Committee: The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society has a Conservation Committee that meets periodically during the year. In 2010, we are exploring working with The Wild Ones to include native orchids in their re-establishment of native plants in the gardens behind the Civic Garden Center. We are also considering helping a The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society member working with the Krohn Conservatory to propagate Cypripediums. The 2010 chair of the Committee is Alexa Noel.

Lighten Your Footprint: Any actions you take to reduce your carbon footprint and the consumption of natural resources can be part of reducing pressure on orchid habitat.

Avoid Buying Orchids Collected from the Wild: Such orchids are stripped from the habitats that support them. Usually the orchids are transferred to environments that cannot support them, and the habitat is compromised beyond its ability to recover.

Supporting Conservation Financially

Act Locally: The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society accepts tax-deductible donations to our Conservation Fund. The fund is used to bring conservation speakers and resources to our area, and to support local and national conservation efforts.

Act Nationally and Globally: The Orchid Conservation Coalition identifies a number of conservation-oriented non-profits on its website. Contributions to these groups will help. The Greater Cincinnati Orchid Society has donated to the University of Florida Plant Restoration, Conservation and Propagation Biotechnology Program.