

# Fragrant ladies'-tresses

(*Spiranthes odorata*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

Fragrant ladies'-tresses is a semi-aquatic to aquatic perennial native orchid. Its flowers are small, white and very fragrant with a vanilla-like scent. They are arranged in a spiral around a terminal spike. Upper tepals may be fused and form a hood-like structure over a lower lip. Like most orchids, the flowers are resupinate, which means their position turns upside down as they develop. Its leaves are basal and narrowly lanceolate. Roots are fleshy and can appear tuberous. Seeds are tiny and born in capsules.



Photo by Mary Keim

Fragrant ladies'-tresses occurs naturally in swamps, wet pinelands and seepage slopes and blooms fall through early winter. It is one of the few orchids that can be considered aquatic.

The genus *Spiranthes* comes from the Greek *speira* or "coil" and *anthos* or "flower." It refers to the spiral arrangement of the inflorescence. The species epithet *odorata* comes from the Latin for "fragrant" or "perfumed"—literally translated as "with an odor."

**Family:** Orchidaceae (Orchid family)

**Native range:** Throughout most of Florida

To see where natural populations of Fragrant ladies'-tresses have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Hardiness:** Zones 8–11

**Soil:** Seasonally wet to moist, well-drained sandy, organic or calcareous soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade

**Growth habit:** 6–10" tall

**Propagation:** Seed

**Garden tips:** Fragrant ladies' tresses is not widely cultivated, however, if you can find it, it is the perfect addition to a bog garden. Plants can tolerate shallow standing water. They are not drought- or salt-tolerant. They can spread via underground runners.

Fragrant ladies' tresses are rarely available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Growers may list availability at [PlantRealFlorida.org](http://PlantRealFlorida.org).



Close-up of flower and stem. Photo by Mary Keim