

Hairy shadow witch

(*Ponthieva racemosa*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Late fall into winter offers some interesting terrestrial orchid blooms in Florida. Among them, the Hairy shadow witch is particularly stunning! It grows among the leaf litter of forest hammocks and swampy areas and can be found alongside blooming Fragrant ladiestresses (*Spiranthes odorata*) and Toothpetal false reinorchid (*Habenaria floribunda*). While the Hairy shadow witch is self-compatible, it is thought to still require an insect pollinator. In Florida, halictid bees have been observed visiting the flowers.



Photo by Emily Bell

This orchid produces a basal rosette of bright green oblanceolate leaves from which a single light brown pubescent flower stalk emerges. The inflorescence consists of up to 35 greenish white flowers. The flowers have deeply concave labellums and the petals have distinct green veins.

Hairy shadow witch orchids range from the Southeastern United States through Mexico, Central America and into South America. It is infrequent in much of its U.S. range, but relatively common in Florida.

The genus *Ponthieva* is named for English merchant Henry de Ponthieu who collected plant specimens for botanist Joseph Banks in the late 1700s. The species epithet *racemosa* is derived from the Latin *racemus*, meaning “cluster” or “bunch” and refers to the plant’s inflorescence.

Family: Orchidaceae (Orchid family)

Native range: Throughout peninsular Florida and west to Bay and Jackson counties

To see where natural populations of Hairy shadow witch have been vouchered, visit florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8A–10B

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist calcareous soil

Exposure: Part to full shade

Growth habit: Up to 2 feet tall

Hairy shadow witch orchids are not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see them.



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