

# Pygmy pipes

(*Monotropis reynoldsiae*)

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

Winter brings some very interesting blooms to North Central Florida's hardwood hammocks, including the quite cryptic Pygmy pipes (*Monotropis reynoldsiae*). With only around 10 populations currently known, this narrow range endemic species is listed as state-endangered. Like its relative, Indianpipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), Pigmy pipes are non-photosynthetic and do not contain chlorophyll. They are a myco-heterotrophic species and attain nutrition by parasitizing underground fungi that are mycorrhizal with trees. As such, they are closely associated with Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and a number of oak (*Quercus sp.*) species.



Photo by Blayre

Pygmy pipes have dull white to deep maroon stems adorned with small whitish scale-like leaves that spiral around the bottom quarter to half of the stem. The upper portion of the stem bears numerous bell-shaped nodding white to pink or lavender flowers. Because they are low-growing and emerge within the leaf litter of the forest floor, Pygmy pipes are well camouflaged.

The species epithet *reynoldsiae* was given in recognition of Mary C Reynolds, the first to enter this species into the botanical record upon finding a population near St. Augustine in December 1884. *Monotropis reynoldsiae* has been historically confused with or even lumped in with Common pygmy pipes (*Monotropis odorata*), which are found throughout the Southeast, but research has confirmed that it is a morphologically and genetically distinct species.

**Family:** Ericaceae (Heath, azalea or blueberry family)

**Native range:** Vouchered in St. Johns, Volusia, Marion, Citrus, Hernando and Pasco counties

*To see where natural populations of Pygmy pipes have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).*

**Hardiness:** Zones 9B-10A

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Dry to moderately dry soils

**Exposure:** Shade

**Growth habit:** Up to 5 inches

Pygmy pipes are not commercially available. Visit a natural area to see them.



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