

TREES AND PLANTS

EASTERN PRAIRIE FRINGED ORCHID

ABOUT

The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*) is also known as Prairie Fringed Orchid, Prairie Orchid, Prairie White-fringed Orchid, and White-fringed Orchid. It is one of the largest and showiest of at least 200 North American orchid species. This plant is a perennial orchid, with an upright leafy stem that grows up to 47 inches high from an underground tuber. Its lance-shaped leaves sheath the stem and are two to eight inches long – growing larger toward the stem base. The 5 to 40 creamy white flowers extend above the leaves and are about one inch long. The nocturnally fragrant flowers attract Hawkmoths that feed on nectar and transfer pollen from flower to flower and plant to plant. Seed germination and proper plant growth rely on the joint relationship between the plants' reduced root systems and a soil-inhabiting fungus for proper nutrition and water uptake. The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid needs full sun for optimum growth and reproduction. It is found in tall grass, silt-loam, or sand prairies, sedge meadows, lakeshore grasslands, fens, and occasionally sphagnum (peat or moss) bogs.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid was added to the US list of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants in September 1989. Their greatest threat is habitat loss, mostly through conversion to cropland, competition with introduced alien plants, filling of wetlands, intensive hay mowing, fire suppression, and overgrazing. These orchids are also picked and collected because of their rarity and beauty. The reliance of this plant on Hawkmoths for pollination means that any threat to the insect, such as the use of insecticides, further endangers its survival. The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid ranges mostly east of the Mississippi River, in fewer than 60 sites in Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Ontario.

For more detailed information visit: www.centerforplantconservation.org or www.fws.gov/endangered.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid ranges mostly east of which River?

- a) The Mississippi River
- b) The Colorado River
- c) The Ohio River
- d) The Hudson River

Answer is A.

