Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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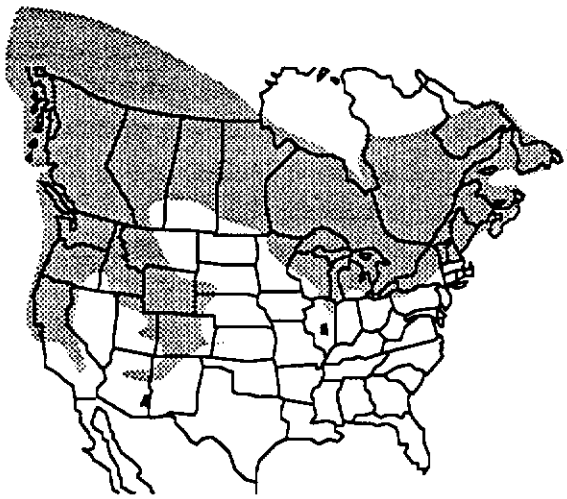
MASSACHUSETTS ENDANGERED PLANTS

HOODED LADIES'-TRESSES
(*Spiranthes romanzoffiana* Cham.)

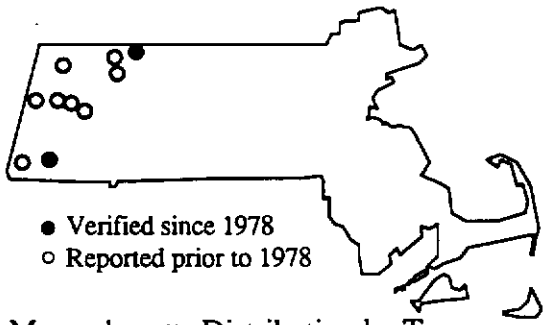
Newcomb, L. Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. Little, Brown, and Company. Boston, 1977.

Description

Hooded Ladies'-tresses is a slender-leaved perennial in the Orchid family (Orchidaceae) that is topped by a spike of small, white flowers. The spiralled arrangement of the blossoms in most species of *Spiranthes* gives the genus its name. *S. romanzoffiana* reaches from 1 to 4 dm (4 to 16 in.) in height and has grasslike, 1-2 dm (4 - 8 in.) long, basal leaves. The linear to linear-spatulate, cauline, or stem-borne, leaves become progressively smaller toward the summit of the stem. Creamy or white, fragrant flowers, only 6-7 mm (1/4 in.) in length, grow from a hairy axis in a double spiral. The white, ovate, recurved lip (downward bending, lowermost flower petal) narrows near the middle, giving it a fiddle shape.



Documented Range of Hooded Ladies'-tresses



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Partial fusion of three sepals (members of the lowermost floral whorl) and two petals results in an upward-arching "hood." Hooded Ladies'-tresses flowers from early August to early September.

Range

The North American range of *S. romanzoffiana* has been documented as extending from Labrador and Newfoundland to Alaska, and south to Pennsylvania, Michigan, South Dakota, Colorado, and California.

Similar Species

Nodding Ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes cernua)* could be confused with *S. romanzoffiana*. However, Nodding Ladies'-tresses has flowers that "nod"--or arch distinctly downward--while those of Hooded Ladies'-tresses are erect.

Habitat in Massachusetts

Hooded Ladies'-tresses is a plant of swamps, bogs, wet shores, and rich woods (woods with nutrient-rich soils and high species diversity). Habitats of Hooded Ladies'-tresses in Massachusetts include a sedge-grass meadow bisected by a streamlet and a peatless, calcareous seep with small streams emerging from gravelly-soiled slopes. Historical habitats (unverified since 1978) include a swampy area at the base of a mountain, a moist roadside, and bogs. Among the plant associates of Hooded Ladies'-tresses are Porcupine Sedge (*Carex hystricina*), Marsh-fern (*Thelypteris palustris*), and Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum viridi-carinatum*). Rare Massachusetts plants that have been found with Hooded Ladies'-tresses include Leafy White Orchis (*Platanthera dilatata*) and Dwarf Scouring-rush (*Equisetum scirpoides*).

Population Status

Hooded Ladies'-tresses is presently listed as "Endangered" in Massachusetts, where there are two current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) and eight historical stations (unverified since 1978). Both current populations are quite small and vulnerable to loss. Indeed, orchids, in general, are quite specific as to habitat and can, therefore, be especially threatened by land development. Hooded Ladies'-tresses is also considered rare in Vermont, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, Nebraska, and New Mexico. It was present historically in Connecticut.