



States in which the eastern (highlighted in black) and western prairie fringed orchids (highlighted in gray) are found.

Prairie Fringed Orchids

The eastern and western prairie fringed orchids are *threatened species*. Threatened species are animals and plants that are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. *Endangered species* are animals and plants that are in danger of becoming extinct. Identifying, protecting, and restoring endangered and threatened species is the primary objective of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species program.



Eastern prairie fringed orchid

What are Prairie Fringed Orchids?

Scientific Names - *Platanthera leucophaea* (eastern prairie fringed orchid); *Platanthera praeclara* (western prairie fringed orchid)

Appearance - Both orchids produce flower stalks up to 47 inches tall. Each stalk has up to 40 white flowers about an inch long. The western prairie fringed orchid's flowers are somewhat larger than those of the closely related eastern prairie fringed orchid.

Range - The eastern prairie fringed orchid occurs mostly east of the Mississippi River in fewer than 60 sites in Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Virginia, Wisconsin, and in Ontario. The western prairie fringed orchid is restricted to west of the Mississippi River and is known from about 75 sites in Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and in Manitoba.

Habitat - Both orchids occur most often in mesic to wet unplowed tallgrass prairies and meadows but have been found in old fields and roadside ditches. The eastern prairie fringed orchid also occurs in bogs, fens, and sedge meadows.

Reproduction - The nocturnally fragrant flowers of these perennial orchids attract hawkmoths that feed on nectar and transfer pollen from flower to flower and plant to plant. Seed germination and proper plant growth depend on a symbiotic relationship between the plants' reduced root systems and a soil-inhabiting fungus for proper water uptake and nutrition.

Why are the Prairie Fringed Orchids Threatened?

Habitat Loss or Degradation - The greatest threat to the prairie fringed orchids is habitat loss, mostly through conversion to cropland. Competition with introduced alien plants, filling of wetlands, intensive hay mowing, fire suppression, and overgrazing also threatens these species.

Collection - These orchids have been collected because of their rarity and beauty.

Pesticides and Other Pollutants - The prairie fringed orchids depend on hawkmoths for pollination. Any threat to these insects, such as the use of insecticides, is a threat to the prairie fringed orchids.

What Is Being Done to Prevent Extinction of the Prairie Fringed Orchids?

Listing - The prairie fringed orchids were added to the U.S. List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants on September 28, 1989.

Recovery Plan - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prepared recovery plans that identify and prioritize actions needed to help the orchids survive.

Research - Researchers are studying the prairie fringed orchids to find the best ways to manage for the orchids and their habitat.

Habitat Protection - Where possible, the orchids' habitat is being protected and habitat is improved with a variety of management techniques. In Illinois, seed was dispersed on some public lands that had good habitat but no orchids. Subsequently, orchids bloomed on at least one of those sites. Private landowners, government agencies, and conservation organizations are helping conserve these species.

Public Education - Public education programs have been developed to raise awareness of the orchids' plight.

What Can I Do to Help Prevent the Extinction of Species?

Learn - Learn more about the prairie fringed orchid and other threatened and endangered species. Understand how the destruction of habitat leads to loss of endangered and threatened plants and animals and our nation's biological diversity. Tell others about what you have learned.

Join and Volunteer - Join a conservation group; many have local chapters. Volunteer at a local nature center, zoo, or national wildlife refuge.

Plant Natives - Use native plants in landscaping and gardening and avoid the use of invasive plants that have been imported from other countries, such as purple loosestrife, dame's rocket, and Japanese and bush honeysuckles.

Plant a Prairie - If you have enough land, use seed from a local source to plant a native prairie.

Minimize - Minimize or eliminate your use of insecticides and herbicides for lawn and garden care. Investigate alternative methods of pest control such as integrated pest management.