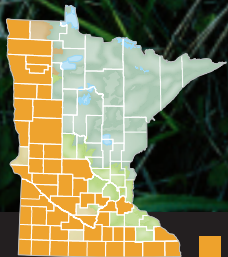


Small White Lady's-Slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*)

- Appearance.** Like our state flower the showy lady's-slipper, this native orchid has a distinctive slipper-shaped pouch. But it is a smaller plant, less than 14 inches tall, with a pure white "slipper" only about 1 inch long. Small white lady's-slippers may have a single stem or as many as 50 stems, which arise from a branched underground rhizome. Each stem has two to four leaves and a single flower, or sometimes two.
- Phenology.** Shoots emerge in May, often through a brown thatch of prairie grasses and sedges. In three weeks the plants reach full size with fully developed flowers. Flowering normally peaks the last week of May in southern Minnesota and early to mid-June in the north. Seed capsules mature by midsummer and disperse seeds through autumn. The leaves begin to fade by September and usually disappear before the first frost.
- Life History.** Small bees crawl into the "slipper," looking for food. They unknowingly pollinate the flower on their way out. Wind can carry the tiny seeds, not much larger than specks of dust, for considerable distances. Seed germination requires ideal moisture conditions and the presence of a specific soil fungus to nurture the young plant. It takes about 12 years before the plant is mature enough to produce its first flower. Then it produces more stems and flowers every year for as long as it lives, perhaps 50 years or more.
- Habitat and Range.** The small white lady's-slipper occurs across southern and western Minnesota, where it grows in wet and moist prairies, some types of sedge meadow, and sometimes in calcareous fens. It almost always grows in habitats that have not been plowed, overgrazed, or drained. It can tolerate dormant-season prairie fires.
- Status.** A Minnesota special-concern species, it occurs in 16 other states and two Canadian provinces. It is considered vulnerable or imperiled in all locations. The DNR Minnesota Biological Survey has begun a monitoring program for this orchid in response to the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, which considers stable or increasing populations as a "measure of success." In 2012, with an Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund grant, botanists and trained volunteers visited 18 sites where this orchid grows and recorded more than 22,000 plants. Minnesota is clearly the global stronghold for this species. See the rare species guide at www.mndnr.gov/rsg. Look for *Native Orchids of Minnesota* by DNR botanist Welby Smith at bookstores and at www.mndnr.gov/books/orchid_book_slides.html.

Janeen Ruby, DNR plant ecologist and botanist



■ SMALL WHITE LADY'S-SLIPPER RANGE