



Bruce Trail  
CONSERVANCY



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## Alaska orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*)



### Did You Know?

It is named for Unalaska, an island in the Aleutian chain where it was first discovered.

It is considered a rare species in Michigan .

Was once in the Genus *Piperia* but moved to *Platanthera* for taxonomic reasons.

Photo: B.Popelier (2014)

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Habitat – Grows best in thin soil of open forests (aspen, birch), grassy borders of thickets, balsam-cedar forests, and clearings with underlying dolomite rock.

Size – Grows up to 20 to 50 cm tall.

Range – Alaska south to California and disjunct in the Great Plains, Great Lakes and eastern Canada.

Status – Ontario, S4 secure/Canada, secure

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## Identification:

Has two larger basal leaves up to 15 cm long near the base with much smaller leaves ascending the stem. Flowers are green in colour, small and form in a dense terminal spike along the slender stem. They are in typical Orchid form and multiple flowers are produced on one plant.



Photo: Flower by B.Popelier (2014)

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## Interesting Facts

The flowers become more fragrant in the evening smelling of a musky, soapy or honey scent. The smell and intensity vary by individual plants.

It is pollinated by moths in the genera *Eupithecia*, *Oidaematophorus* and *Platypyla*. Pollen attaches to the insects proboscis or mouth part and is transferred from one plant to the next as the moths feed.

It is also called the Short-spur Orchid due to the fact that this species has shorter spurs than other orchids. Another common name is the Slender Spire orchid.

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## Alaska Orchids on the Niagara Escarpment

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is continually acquiring and conserving land along the Niagara Escarpment, including the northern areas where Alaska Orchids can be found. This species of orchid thrives on BTC properties in the Peninsula section and has been readily found amongst the carpet of wildflowers that cloak this area of the Bruce Trail in the spring and summer months. Our native orchids are best left in the wild and do not survive if dug up and transplanted. Please enjoy them in their natural habitat, enjoy them where you found them and take a picture, it will last much longer.