

Listera australis Lindl., the southern twayblade of the Orchidaceae, the Orchid Family is a spring ephemeral of Delaware's Coastal Plain physiographic province. Of the 48 species of terrestrial orchids known to occur in Delaware, this species is the first orchid of the season to bloom.

In Delaware, the flowering period for the southern twayblade typically begins in mid-April, and lasts for only a short while. Flowers blossom and the ovary matures all in a few short weeks, so the window of opportunity to see this species closes quickly.

The southern twayblade is actually hard to find due to its shy nature and diminutive size. It usually requires one to get down on their hands and knees in order to find it. It only grows to a height of about 6 to 8 inches and blends in very well with the surrounding pine needles and leaf litter.

The inflorescence is a loose raceme of 5-25 tiny flowers that are purplish-green in color. The stem is slender and erect, also purplish-green in color, with two opposite leaves born at about the middle of the stem that are sessile, green in color and ovate in shape. The flowers are pollinated by minute insects.

In Delaware, this species is found growing in wet, swampy woods usually with a mix of loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and red maple (*Acer rubrum*). Though considered to be an uncommon species in the state, occasionally one can find 1000's of individuals growing within a localized area.

The southern twayblade is primarily a Coastal Plain species and has a more southern distribution, occurring from Florida to New York. This species is currently known in Delaware from Sussex and Kent Counties and was first documented in the state in 1990.

The genus *Listera* is represented by 25 species in North America, and the species *australis* is the only representative of the genus in Delaware. The species name is from the Latin *australis*, meaning "southern," referring to the more southern distribution of the species

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July 2008