

Missouri Master Naturalist 2022 Certification Pin



Grass Pink

Calopogon tuberosus

Orchid Family (Orchidaceae)

Description

Grass pink genus name is derived from the Greek word for “beautiful beard,” and the species name is Latin for “tuberous”. The unbranched stem grows to 27 inches tall. A single grass-like leaf occurs near the base of the central stem. There are usually one to two short sheaths just above the corm. The leaf is usually much shorter than the inflorescence. The structure of the flower for this orchid is highly unusual because its lip is located at the top rather than the bottom, causing the flower to appear upside down (even though it is right side up).

Bloom

The blooming period occurs from June to early July, lasting about 3-4 weeks. The slender stem ends in a loose spike-like raceme of 3-10 showy flowers that range from 1-2 1/2 inches across. Flowers are rose-pink to orchid with deeper colored veining in the sepals and petals and gold and white beards on their tips. The sepals and petals spread outward exposing the anther column, which is the same color. The sepals are sharply pointed, the two lateral ones are sickle-shaped and the lower one is lance-shaped. The two lateral petals are also sickle-shaped though not as sharply pointed as the sepals. The flowers bloom sequentially from bottom to top of the floral spike and are sweetly fragrant. They give way to fat, green pods packed with thousands of seeds maturing in late summer.

Habitat and Distribution

This delicate orchid occurs in fens (calcareous wet meadows) and occasionally in moist open woods. Its population is scattered in counties of the Lower Ozark and St. Francois Mountain sections of the Ozark Natural Division in the southeastern portion of Missouri. A similar species, *Calopogon oklahomensis* is found in Tallgrass prairie remnants in the Osage Plains and Springfield Plateau regions at Taberville and Diamond Grove Prairies

Status

Both the grass pink, also commonly called swamp pink, and *C oklahomensis*, are listed as species of conservation concern.

Faunal Associations

Bumblebees and other large, long-tongued bees are the primary pollinators of the flowers. Halictid bees, flies, butterflies, skippers, and beetles also visit the flowers occasionally, but they are unlikely to be effective at cross-pollination. Neither nectar nor accessible pollen are available to such flower-visiting insects. Instead, they are lured by deception to land on the showy flowers. They are often attracted to the colorful pseudo-stamens on the lips of the flower. If the visiting insect has sufficient weight, the hinged lip of the flower collapses onto its exposed reproductive column, attaching pollinia to the back of the insect. When the same insect visits the next flower, the same process can deposit the pollinia, enabling cross-pollination to occur.