

Spring Ladies'-tresses *Spiranthes vernalis*

Description

Spring Ladies'-tresses is an herbaceous perennial that may grow to 1½ feet (ca 0.5 m) in height. The aerial stem arises from several fingerlike roots. The leaves occur at the base and on the lower stem and have an alternate arrangement, and have a linear or narrowly lance-like shape, to 6 inches or more (to 15 or more cm) in length and 3/8 inch (1 cm) in width. They are usually present at flowering time, unlike some other species of Ladies'-tresses where the leaves are not evident at blooming time. The white flowers, appearing from May to August, are arranged in a loose spiral or coil around the stem. The surface of the stem along which the flowers are attached usually has a dense covering of very short (0.2-0.3 mm) pointed hairs, a key identification feature. The individual flower has its sepals and petals, which average about 5/16 inch (7 mm) in length, projecting forward together in a tube-like manner, with the lowermost petal (called a "lip" in orchids) marked with yellow in its center and having crisped margins around its exposed tip.

Distribution & Habitat

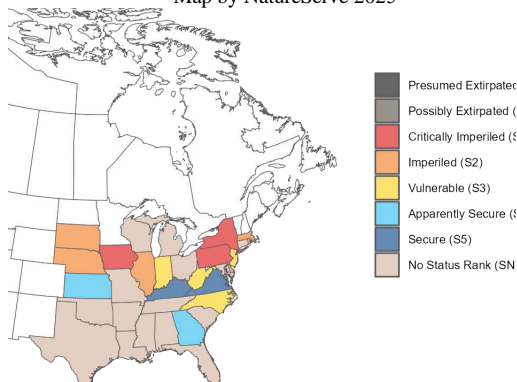
Spring Ladies'-tresses ranges from southern New England to South Dakota and south into Florida and New Mexico. In Pennsylvania, it has been documented historically in the southeastern counties. It grows in grasslands, meadows, clearings, and open woods.



Photo source: Thomas Barnes @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe 2025



Conservation Considerations

The viability of populations of Spring Ladies'-tresses and its habitat may require active management, such as periodic mowing and invasive species removal, in order to maintain the proper ecological stage for the species. Excessive deer browse may be a threat at some locations. Additional field surveys are needed for this species, which can be difficult to detect because of its inconspicuous and unpredictable nature.

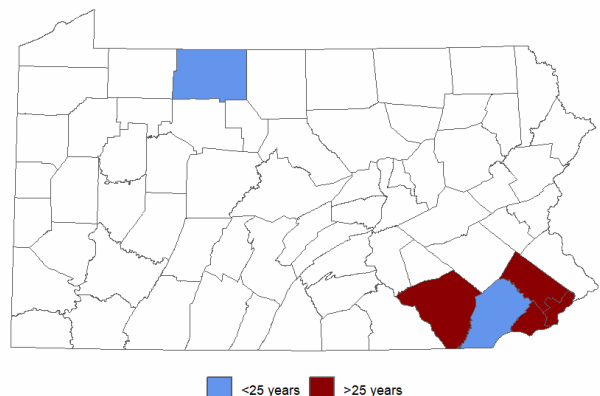
NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; **S1** – Critically imperiled in Pennsylvania

Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Spring Ladies'-tresses to be a species of special concern, based on the relatively few locations that have been recently confirmed. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Endangered.

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References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2025.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.