

Rose Pogonia

Pogonia ophioglossoides

By **Barbara Nuffer**

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Commonly known as rose pogonia, *Pogonia ophioglossoides* (Jussieu) is a native wild orchid frequently found in acidic, boggy areas. These areas typically contain sphagnum moss, including the unique floating mat bogs that we find in our pristine Adirondack lakes and ponds.

Orchid flowers have evolved complex structures designed to lure insects to assist in their pollination. Bees land on the brightly colored lip or labellum of the rose pogonia flower. As a bee enters a bloom, pollen from the previous flower visited by the bee is removed by the bloom's sticky stigma. After the bee has fed on the flower's nectar, the bee backs out of the flower, and its back is showered in pollen, which it will carry to the next flower.

The rose pogonia's pink flowers appear in early summer. Each flower has three pink petals and three petal-like sepals and smells like fresh raspberries. The central sepal

is modified into the labellum, which has light and dark fringing on the end, a yellow interior, and dark and light pink stripes deep inside. The labellum's fringe gives it a bearded appearance; hence its generic name, *Pogonia*, which is a Greek word meaning beard.

The designation (Jussieu), refers to French botanist Antoine Laurent de Jussieu. The father of binomial nomenclature, Carrolus Linnaeus, classified families of plants based solely on the structure of their

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reproductive organs. This resulted in unrelated plants being classified together, and related ones being split apart. In contrast, Jussieu classified the families based on all the characteristics of the plants, rather than just the reproductive organs.

Orchids are dependent on specific soil fungi for their nutritional needs. Although it may be tempting to transplant an orchid into your garden, all of New York's native orchids are protected. This means they cannot be picked or damaged without consent of the landowner. Regardless, the plant is unlikely to

survive if you remove it from its native soil and associated fungi.

Surprisingly, New York has more than 40 species of native orchids. Orchids belong to one of the largest families of flowering plants; found on every continent except Antarctica, more than 15,000 species are found throughout the world. They are most numerous in humid, tropical areas. Of the ten species in the genus *Pogonia*, nine are found in East Asia and only one is found in North America. We are truly lucky to have this plant in our midst!

So plan to visit one of New York's acidic bogs in early summer and enjoy the unrivaled beauty of this perfect pink orchid.

DEC air scientist **Barbara Nuffer** appreciates wildflowers from her Capital District home.

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