

WORM-VINE ORCHID

Vanilla barbellata Reichenb. f.

Synonyms: *Vanilla articulata* Northr.

Family: Orchidaceae (orchid)

FNAI Ranks: G4G5/S2

Legal Status: US-none FL-Endangered

Wetland Status: US-NI+ FL-FAC



Amy Jenkins

Field Description: Climbing, usually leafless **vine** with fleshy green or orange stems with a few aerial roots at each node, about 4 inches apart. **Leaves** about 1.5 inches long, lance-shaped, appearing on new branches but quickly falling. **Flowers** develop from buds resembling tiny bananas, opening at night and closing by noon of the next day. **Sepals and petals** greenish-yellow, widely spreading. **Lip** 3-lobed, the side lobes white with purple speckles, upcurved, almost forming a tube; the middle lobe purple with a white central stripe and white margins, down-curved at the tip. **Fruit** 4 inches long, nodding, finger-like, orange when ripe.

Similar Species: Fuchs' vanilla (*Vanilla inodora*) has large, persistent leaves, green sepals and petals, and a white lip with a yellow fleshy crest. Leafy vanilla (*Vanilla phaeantha*) has small persistent leaves, green sepals and petals, and a yellow-striped white lip. Leafless vanilla (*Vanilla dilloniana*) resembles worm-vine orchid except its flower has a dark red lip without white margins.

worm-vine orchid

Vanilla barbellata

Related Rare Species: Fuchs' vanilla (*Vanilla inodora*) has large, persistent leaves, green sepals and petals, and a white lip with a yellow fleshy crest. Leafy vanilla (*Vanilla phaeantha*) has small persistent leaves, green sepals and petals, and a yellow-striped white lip. Leafless vanilla (*Vanilla dilloniana*) resembles worm-vine orchid except its flower has a dark red lip without white margins.

Habitat: Mangroves, coastal hammocks, bay tree islands, occasionally pine rocklands; hemiepiphytic.

Best Survey Season: Spring-summer; individual flowers last only 1 day.

Range-wide Distribution: Worm-vine, leafless, and leafy vanilla: FL, West Indies. Fuchs' vanilla: FL, West Indies, Central and South America.

Conservation Status: All known FL populations of *Vanilla* occur in managed areas but all have been decimated by plant collectors. Leafless vanilla has not been seen in the wild in decades and is probably extirpated.

Protection and Management: Enforce plant protection laws and prosecute plant poachers. Purchase and protect rocklands and coastal hammocks.

References: Coile 2000, IRC 1999, Luer 1972, McCartney 1992a, Ward 1979, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a.