

WORM-VINE ORCHID

Vanilla barbellata Reichenb. f.

Synonyms: *Vanilla articulata* Northr.

Family: Orchidaceae (orchid)

FNAI Ranks: G4G5/S2

Legal Status: US-none; FL-Endangered



Amy Jenkins

Field Description: Climbing, usually leafless **vine** with fleshy green or orange stems with a few aerial roots at each node, about 10 cm apart. **Leaves** about 3.8 cm 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** 10 cm 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.

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.

