

CYPRIPEDIUM ARIETINUM



Cypripedium arietinum W.T. Aiton

Accepted Synonyms: *Criosanthes arietina*

Commonly known as Ram's Head Lady's Slipper, has a limited distribution across northeastern and central Canada and the U.S., from Quebec to Wisconsin. It has a distinctively conical and pointed labellum, which is white with reddish veins and covered with thin white hairs. The dorsal sepal curves to form a hood over the labellum, while the lateral petals and sepals, purple or green in color, form spirals which twist away from the pouch. It produces 3 to 5 blueish green leaves on its stems. Although this orchid is known to be pollinated by bees, it primarily reproduces vegetatively through offshoots from its rhizome, sometimes resulting in clusters of over a dozen plants in a single location. It grows in coniferous or mixed forests, swamps, and mossy bogs, often near cedar, spruce, or juniper trees.

Cypripedium arietinum is considered globally vulnerable, and is rare or endangered throughout much of its range.

Pollination

This orchid is pollinated by female halictid bees such as *Lasioglossum coeruleum*. The showy white and magenta flowers produce a sweet vanilla fragrance that attracts bees into the pouch formed by the labellum. The bee enters the flower and exits with pollen on its thorax.

Biology / Life History

Cypripedium arietinum is a very primitive species and has a long history in the geological past. Evidence presented by Sing-Chi (1983) indicates that millions of years ago it occurred across North America and eastern Asia. However, scattered remnants in eastern North America and a few populations of a closely related counterpart in western China are all that are left of this previous distribution. It is a long-lived perennial pollinated by a variety of small bees. It reproduces only by seeds, which are spread short distances by the wind.

The best time to search for *C. arietinum* is when it is in flower from late May through mid-June.

Growing to a maximum height of just 30 centimetres, it is an easily overlooked orchid. Yet this species is much appreciated for its beauty and for its pleasant, delicate fragrance. It is also one of the most distinctive of the Lady's Slipper orchids (Cypripedioidea), with its small, terminal flower bearing a pouched lower lip that is shaped like an inverted conical hat and covered in a crimson net-like pattern and dense, white hairs.

