



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
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Nodding Pogonia

Triphora trianthophora (Sw.) Rydb.

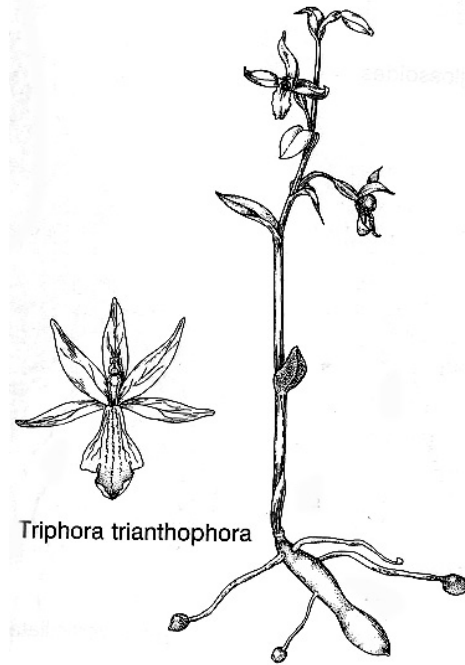
State Status: **Endangered**

Federal Status: **None**

Description: Nodding Pogonia, or Three Birds Orchid (*Triphora trianthophora*), is a delicate perennial of the Orchidaceae family. This small and inconspicuous plant forms colonies by stolons (horizontal, above-ground stems), often hidden in leaf-litter. White to pink flowers open for only one or two days each August, and in some years may not emerge from the ground at all. Like many orchids, it is thought to depend upon a symbiotic relationship with soil fungi. In Massachusetts, this tiny plant often grows in shallow depressions of beech-filled woodlands on slopes and in ravines. It is usually associated with beech elsewhere in New England as well.

Aids to identification: This plant is most often found in colonies of clustered stems. Each stem usually bears three (sometimes more) white to pink flowers which, at maturity, nod from the axils of leaf-like bracts near the top of the stems, resembling small birds. The labellum (lowest, "lip" petal) of each flower has three green to yellow, raised ridges.

Similar species: This species is quite distinct from the other orchids of mesic woodland habitats. The combination of its 1) colonial nature, 2) relatively unspecialized labellum which does not form a pouch, sac, or spur as in many orchids, and 3) small, alternate, ovate, clasping leaves serves to distinguish this from other small woodland orchids.

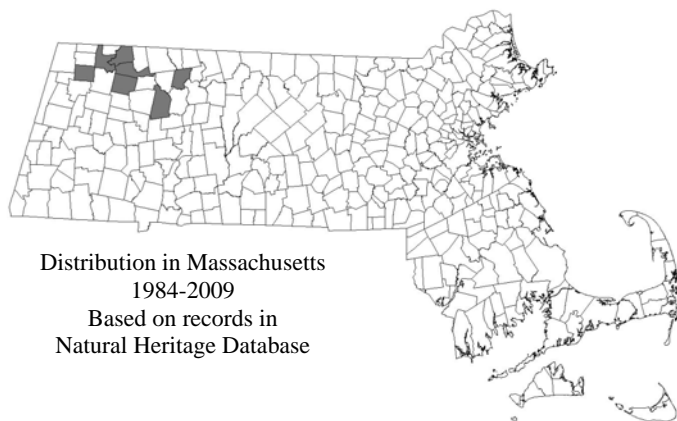


Triphora trianthophora

Holmgren, N. 1998. *The Illustrated Companion to Gleason and Cronquist's Manual*. New York Botanical Garden.

Habitat: Nodding Pogonia grows in sloping, mesic, mixed hardwood forests, usually beech-dominated, in deep pockets or hollows with accumulated leaf litter and deep humus. It is usually found with very few herbaceous associates. Light is usually filtered through a moderately open canopy. Soil pH does not seem to be an important factor for this species.

Population status in Massachusetts: The Nodding Pogonia is listed as Endangered by the Commonwealth. It is also considered to be rare throughout the New England region. In Massachusetts, it is known from five current stations and one historical station (not documented within the past 25 years). As with all species listed in Massachusetts, individuals of the species are protected from take (picking, collecting, killing) or sale under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act.



Distribution in Massachusetts
1984-2009
Based on records in
Natural Heritage Database

Threats: The upland, wooded habitat of this species is threatened by conversion to residential or other types of development. Ill-timed or heavy timber harvest or removal of leaf litter would also be detrimental to the Nodding Pogonia.

Range: This orchid is found from Maine west to Wisconsin, south to Florida and Texas.

Management Recommendations: Little is known about the specific requirements of this small orchid; however, relationships with soil fungi within the woodland community are thought to be important. As such, maintaining the intact surrounding habitat with as little human disturbance as possible is the primary management goal. Because orchid propagation and reintroductions are notoriously difficult, reintroduction may not be feasible, at least until extensive research is conducted to elucidate the complex relationships this plant may have with soil organisms, pollinators, and other plants.

Flowers Present

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Updated 25 February 2009

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