

Protecting the Phantom of the Forest

The Endangered *Phantom Orchid* Needs Your Help



How can I help protect them?



Care for the habitat by not disturbing the plants, soil, and hydrology — even if no orchids are visible, the underground parts may still be there.



Keep recreational trails away from known orchid sites and stay on designated paths.



Avoid the use of fertilizers, herbicides, or pesticides near orchid locations as they can harm these sensitive plants.



Help stop the spread of invasive plants that can take over and crowd out orchids.

If you see a Phantom Orchid,

let us know!

Your sightings help us learn where orchids are growing so we can better protect them.

Take photos, note the location, and how many plants you see; then report it through the Fraser Valley Conservancy's nature inquiry form: <https://fraservalleyconservancy.ca/phantom-orchid/>



THANK YOU TO THE PROJECT FUNDERS



HABITAT CONSERVATION
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South Coast Conservation Program | sccp.ca

Fraser Valley Conservancy | fraservalleyconservancy.ca

E-mail: outreach@fraservalleyconservancy.ca

Meet the Phantom Orchid:

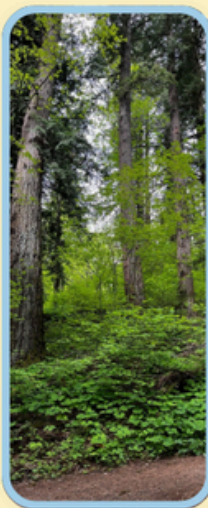
One of Canada's Rarest Blooms

What Makes the Phantom Orchid (*Cephalanthera austini*) so Unique?

Ghostly Appearance: The white color comes from a lack of chlorophyll, meaning it cannot photosynthesize like most plants.

Underground Lifestyle: It survives through an unusual three-way symbiotic relationship with specific fungi and the roots of unknown tree species, allowing most of the plant to remain hidden underground.

Mysterious Behaviour: The orchid is notoriously unpredictable. Its blooming varies from year to year depending on subtle changes in its environment.



Where to Spot It

In the Fraser Valley, find them on south and southwest-facing slopes or knolls at low elevations. They grow typically in shaded forested areas with sparse ground cover, and are often found in calcium-rich soils.

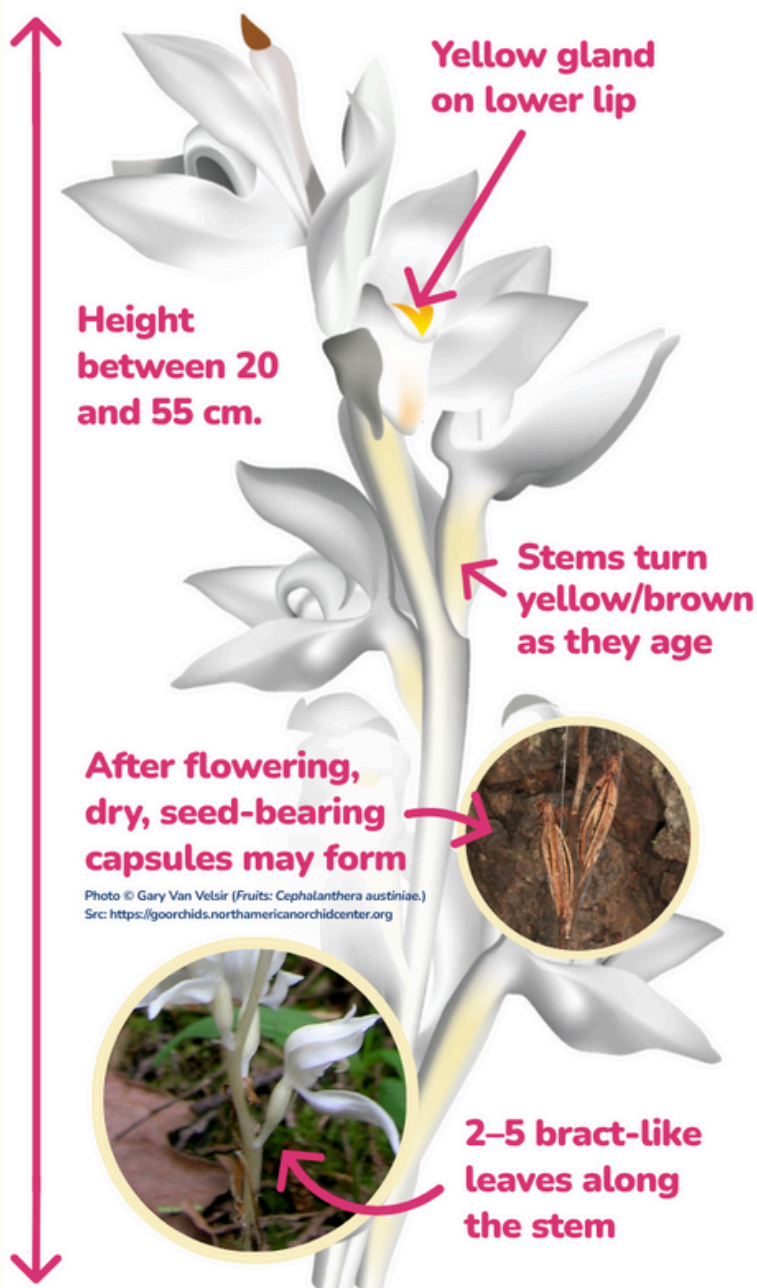
The only other Canadian locations include: southeastern Vancouver Island and the Southern Gulf Islands.

Best Time to Search

May to July, when it is most likely to bloom.

How to Spot a Phantom Orchid in Bloom

Flowering stems have ~5–20 vanilla scented white flowers



Height between 20 and 55 cm.

Yellow gland on lower lip

Stems turn yellow/brown as they age

After flowering, dry, seed-bearing capsules may form

2-5 bract-like leaves along the stem

Photo © Gary Van Velsir (Fruits: *Cephalanthera austini*.)
Src: <https://goorchids.northamericanorchidcenter.org>

Don't Get Confused!

Phantom orchids are often confused with ghost pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), but *here's the difference:*



PHANTOM ORCHID

Has *many* upright flowers on each stem, each with a distinctive yellow gland on the lower lip.



GHOST PIPE

Has just *one* drooping, bell-shaped flower per stem. The flowers are entirely white, with no yellow spot.

