



The Lady's Slipper Orchid

Cypripedium parviflorum (yellow)

Cypripedium acaule (Pink)

The Yellow Lady's Slipper, additionally known as the Moccasin Flower, is native to North America. It is actually a member of the orchid family (Orchidaceae). This perennial plant comes in four varieties with multiple hybrids, making identification difficult. The range is from the eastern United States and Canada, west to the Rocky Mountains and north to Alaska. Yellow Lady's Slippers like to grow in shady, damp woodlands and forests, along streams, wetlands, and in The Great Swamp.

Yellow Lady's Slippers grow up to 3 feet tall, with multiple stems. These lengthy stems have 3 to 6 green leaves with 1 or 2 flowers on each stem. There are three greenish, yellow, brownish, and purple sepals surrounding the flower. The yellow flower is an average of 2 to 3 inches long and cupped to form the slipper shape. You can see the blossoms in June and July.

The Pink Lady's Slipper, also known as the Moccasin Flower, is native to eastern North America. The range for the Pinks is Canada, the Great Lakes region, northeast to Maine and New Hampshire and south to the Appalachian Mountains to Alabama. Pink Lady's Slippers like to grow in partially shaded moist soil in forests, woodlands, near pine trees, in wetlands, and in The Great Swamp.

Pink Lady's Slippers reach 6 to 15 inches in height, often growing in groups. The stems have fine hairs with two smooth green leaves, each of which averages 1 to 3 inches wide and 8 inches long with a central vein that grows from the lowest part of the stem. The pink- to rose-colored flowers, with darker colored veins, bloom on leafless stalks. The cup-shaped flowers are about 2 inches long and at the top of the flower are 2 narrow yellow/green to purple twisted petals. The Pinks bloom earlier than the Yellows, in May and June.

Yellow Lady's Slippers and Pink Lady's Slippers are both native to the Hudson Valley region of New York State. Lady's Slipper orchids grow slowly. It can take years for these orchids to mature and produce flowers. Fungi help the plants to obtain nutrients and help the tiny seeds to germinate. The sweet scent and bright colors of Lady's Slippers attract insects and bees who pollinate the plants. This orchid may live for 20 years or more.

Lady's Slippers are a favorite garden feature; nurseries cultivate them to satisfy the frequent requests of gardeners.

Threats to the survival of the Lady's Slipper are the destruction of habitat through development, environmental pollutants, and illegal harvesting. Conservation efforts include habitat preservation, cultivation, and reintroduction programs.

Conservation Status: The Lady's Slipper is protected in New York State.

Mythology: Because of the beauty and unique slipper-shaped blooms, cultures around the world regard the Lady's Slipper as a symbol of beauty and elegance.