

Indian Pipe

By **A. J. Hruska**, Gerald, Saskatchewan

Almost overnight in the last week of July or early in August a little plant makes its appearance and quickly grows and flowers in moist shady woods. This plant, *Monotropa uniflora* L., is commonly called the Indian Pipe or Corpse Plant. It is never found in abundance in Saskatchewan but according to some botanists it is a plant of common occurrence in much of North America.

This plant is curious in several aspects and I like to think of it as a hidden beauty of nature. The plant is waxy and nearly pure white for it lacks chlorophyll. It grows about 4 to 8 inches in height. The stems grow singly or in clumps. There are no leaves but are small white bract-like scales attached alternately along the stem.

The drooping bell-shaped flower has several white sepals and five white petals. When the innumerable small seeds start forming the stem straightens up and the rounded capsule is borne erect at the top of the stem. After fertilization the plant begins to take on a rich brown color. If the white plant is picked or dried before it ripens it quickly turns black.

This unusual plant is sometimes referred to as being rather unpleasant and clammy to the touch. Its curious appearance is explained by the fact that it cannot make its own food as do the green plants. Plants that are not green are either saprophytes, getting their food from the dead organic material in the soil, or they are parasites, feeding directly on living plants or animals. Most saprophytes and parasites are bacteria or fungi, but in several different families of the flowering plants there are a few species which have lost the ability to make their own food. The Indian Pipe is a good example of such a non-green plant belonging to a group whose other members are immediately recognized as flowering plants—for example, the winter-greens and heaths (azalea, laurel, rhododendron).

Most botanists classify the Indian Pipe as a parasite and saprophyte. Latest studies, however, seem to abandon the former tag and class the plant as a symbiote. That is to

say, there may be a fungus associated with the roots of this plant decomposing organic material for its use. My personal experience of the plant leads me to think that it is not a parasite.



Photo by J. A. Herrick

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Orchids of the Cypress Hills

By **B. de Vries**, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan

There are 14 species and 2 varieties of the Orchid Family listed for the Cypress Hills area. While I was there last June, I was fortunate enough to find 7 different orchids. The outstanding orchid was the rare *Calypso bulbosa* (L.) Oakes, commonly called Venus' Slipper. This exceed-