



How do you use a flora or a field guide? *Uvularia sessilifolia* is a common spring wildflower of eastern North America. Below is its entry in *Flora of North America* (volume 26, page 148).

If you have a field guide to the plants of your region, you'll see that floras and field guides are similar in many ways. Both a flora and a field guide help you identify the plant species of a particular area. Both give a plant's name and description, and some information about its ecology and distribution. A flora provides more details. Unlike a field guide—small enough to carry in your pocket—a flora is a comprehensive desk reference.

The details are easy to understand with a few simple directions.

Genus
+
Species epithet

2. *Uvularia sessilifolia* Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 1: 305. 1753
• Sessile-leaved bellwort, wild-oats, straw-lily, uvulaire à feuilles sessiles [E] [F] [WI]



Oakesia sessilifolia (Linnaeus) S. Watson; *Oakesiella sessilifolia* (Linnaeus) Small

Rhizomes elongate, slender, 10–15 cm, bearing scattered, fibrous roots; stolons present. **Stem** 1, 1-branched, angled distally, 1–4.5 dm, nodes glabrous, bearing 1–2 leaves below lowest branch. **Leaf**

blades sessile, narrowly to broadly elliptic, 4–6.5(–8) × (1.3–)1.6–2.8(–4) cm, glabrous abaxially, margins minutely denticulate, apex acute to acuminate. **Flowers** 1 per stem; peduncles 0.6–1.6 cm, ebracteate; tepals pale straw-yellow, 13–25 × 2–4.5 mm, smooth abaxially, apex rounded to acute; stamens 8–15 mm; anthers 5–12 mm; connectives 0.3–0.5 mm; ovary stipitate, sharply triangular, flowering stipe 0.8–1.2 mm; style 10–15 mm; stigma lobes 1–2 mm. **Capsules** sharply 3-winged, stipitate, ellipsoid, 2–3 × 1–1.6 cm, not beaked; fruiting stipe 2–5 mm. **Seeds** 3–5 mm; arils crested. **2n** = 14.

Flowering spring–early summer. Moist hardwood coves, alluvial bottomlands, thickets and xeric woods northwards; 0–1000 m; Man., N.B., N.S., Ont., Que.; Ala., Ark., Conn., Del., D.C., Fla., Ga., Ill., Ind., Iowa, Ky., La., Maine, Md., Mass., Mich., Minn., Miss., Mo., N.H., N.J., N.Y., N.C., N.Dak., Ohio, Okla., Pa., R.I., S.C., Tenn., Tex., Vt., Va., W.Va., Wis.

Authority—the person who published the scientific name.

Common names—local names
Codes that follow indicate the species is endemic, illustrated in the flora, and weedy.

Synonyms—names used in earlier publications.

Descriptions give features for identifying the species.

The **2n** is the diploid **chromosome count**. Chromosome counts vary greatly among plants. They can indicate if a plant is polyploid (> 2 sets of chromosomes) due to hybridization.

Flowering time, habitat, & distribution are helpful. Some species in the same area stagger flowering time, reducing competition for pollinators. Related species often live in different areas or habitats.

= Binomial nomenclature

(the 2-name system used by scientists around the world)

Before binomials, organisms were known by long descriptive word strings—some up to 63 words! Latin was the universal language of education when Linnaeus introduced his 2-word system for scientific names.

Linnaeus used the new naming system for plants in the 1753 publication *Species Plantarum* and for animals in the 1758 publication *Systema Naturae*, 10th edition.

And he changed his Swedish name, **Carl von Linné**, to a Latin form, **Carolus Linnaeus**.

Why bother learning binomials? Latin binomials might seem like a difficult mouthful, but they guarantee someone knows exactly which plant you are talking about. There is one correct Latin name for a species, but often many common names. Luckily, there is no universally correct pronunciation: just as the British ta-MAH-toe and the American ta-MAY-toe are both correct pronunciations of tomato.

Linnaeus named the genus *Uvularia* because the flowers hang down in a way that reminded him of the small mass of tissue above the tongue, the uvula. He chose the species epithet *sessilifolia* to describe the way the leaves, lacking a petiole, sit directly on the stem (Latin *sessilis*, seated, and *folia*, leaves).

How much did you discover about *Uvularia sessilifolia* just by learning its Latin binomial?