

Early purple orchid

Orchis mascula (L.) L.

DESCRIPTION

This hardy plant reaches on average 50–60 centimeters of height. The leaves, grouped at the base of the stem, are oblong-lanceolate, pale green, sometimes with brownish-purple speckles. The inflorescence is 7.5–12.5 centimeters long, and it is composed of 6 to 20 flowers gathered in dense cylindrical spikes. The color of the flower varies from pinkish-purple to purple. The flowers have six tepals, being three small sepals and three petals. The lateral sepals are ovate-lanceolate and erect. The median one, together with the petals, is smaller and covers the gynostegium. The flowering happens from April through June.



HABITAT

Early purple orchid requires a sunny spot on diverse soils: loamy or clay. It can be found on meadows, in grassland, maquis as well as dry and well-exposed slopes, at an altitude of 800–2.600 meters or more above sea level.

DISTRIBUTION

This orchid is native to southwestern Eurasia, from western Europe through the Mediterranean region eastwards to Syria and Iraq.

ENDANGERMENT

Habitat destruction by unplanned urbanization, natural successions in open habitat, underground fires. Also, a special threat is the disappearance of insects adapted for its pollination.

PROTECTION

It is on the CITES list of species and listed in the red books of several countries.

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