

GIANT ORCHID

Pteroglossaspis ecristata (Fern.) Rolfe

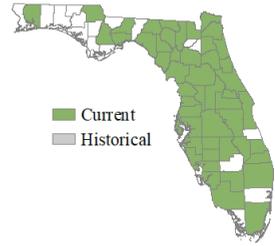
Synonyms: *Eulophia ecristata* (Fern.) Ames; *Orthochilus ecristata* (Fernald) Bytebier

Family: Orchidaceae (orchid)

FNAI Ranks: G2G3/S2

Legal Status: US-none FL-Threatened

Wetland Status: US-none FL-none



Photos by Amy Jenkins

Field Description: Perennial herb with 2 - 4 basal leaves 6 - 28 inches long and 0.5 - 1.5 inches wide, erect, pleated, with 3 - 5 strong veins. **Flower stalk** 1 - 5.5 feet tall, leafless except for a few bracts, with a terminal spike of 5 - 30 flowers. **Flowers** twisted in toward the stalk, with a stiff floral bract, 2.5 inches long, beneath each flower. **Sepals and petals** yellow-green, folded forward over the lip; **lip** 3-lobed, without a crest, the prominent central lobe maroon with green margins. **Fruit** a rounded capsule, pointed upwards.

Similar Species: Only orchid with 5-foot tall flowering stalk and yellowish maroon flowers. The related wild coco (*Eulophia alta*), found from Pasco and Flagler counties southward, has a similar leaf but shorter flowering stalk and its flowers are all maroon (vs. flowers with yellow outside and maroon inside in giant orchid). Fruiting pods of wild coco dangle from the stem in contrast to pods held erect against the stem in giant orchid. Wild coco is found mostly in roadside ditches. Giant orchid leaves resemble those of saw palmetto seedlings, but are softer.

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Related Rare Species: Over 70 orchid species are listed as threatened or endangered in FL.

Habitat: Sandhill, scrub, pine flatwoods, pine rocklands, and occasionally in old fields.

Best Survey Season: Flowers July - September, fruits September - November.

Range-wide Distribution: Throughout the southeastern United States and extends into Cuba. Throughout the Florida peninsula. Distribution of giant orchid is sporadic throughout its range, perhaps owing to its rather inconspicuous habit.

Conservation Status: Occurrences known in many managed areas, but low individual count is common. The greatest threat to this species is the destruction of its habitat by conversion to urban, suburban, or agricultural uses.

Protection and Management: Use prescribed fire to create sunny openings and reduce competition from woody species. Avoid soil-disturbing activities such as bedding and plowing fire lanes.

References: Coile 2000, IRC 1999, Luer 1972, McCartney 1992, Sorrie 1993, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011, Wunderlin et al. 2018.

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