

GIANT ORCHID

Orthochilus ecristatus (Fernald) Byteler

Synonyms: *Eulophia ecristata* (Fern.) Ames;

Pteroglossaspis ecristata (Fern.) Rolfe

Family: Orchidaceae (orchid)

FNAI Ranks: G4/S4

Legal Status: US-none; FL-Threatened



Flowers greenish, purplish-brown, maroon or yellowish. Sepals converging, not ascending or reflexed. Taken at Hickey Creek Wildlife and Environmental Area. Photo by Amy Jenkins.

Field Description: **Plants** without above-ground pseudobulbs; **leaves** 2-many, basal, plicate, and present at flowering; **lip** not inflated, oriented downward (resupinate); **flowers** greenish, purplish-brown, maroon or yellowish; **sepals** converging, not ascending or reflexed; **fruit** a rounded capsule, pointed upwards.

Similar Species: Only terrestrial orchid with tall (approaching 1 m) flowering stalk and yellowish maroon flowers. The related wild coco (*Eulophia alta*), found from Pasco and Flagler counties southward, has a similar leaf, tall 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.

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

giant orchid

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

Best Survey Season: Summer-fall; July - September, fruits September - November.

Range-wide Distribution: Se. NC south to FL, west to LA; West Indies (Cuba). Throughout the Florida peninsula. Distribution of giant orchid is sporadic throughout its range, perhaps owing to its rather inconspicuous habit.

Conservation Status: The greatest threat to this species is the destruction of its habitat by conversion to urban, suburban, or agricultural uses. The species is, however, unranked by the state and apparently secure.

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, Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2023, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011, Wunderlin et al. 2018.



Flowers greenish, purplish-brown, maroon or yellowish. Sepals converging, not ascending or reflexed. Taken at Jennings State Forest.
Photo by Dan Hipes.

giant orchid

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Erect dried fruit in scrubby flatwoods at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Growing in scrubby flatwoods at Caravelle Ranch Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

giant orchid

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