



## South African Weed-orchid (*Disa bracteata*)

### Description:

Robust, erect, bright green, fleshy perennial herb, 20cm – 40cm tall when mature. Produces new, underground tubers each year as it grows, from which annual above-ground growth forms in early Spring. Plant emerges as a rosette of multiple narrow, green, pointed leaves (around 6-10 leaves, each leaf around 3-15cm long and 1-1.5cm wide). Leaves often with purple undersides, sometimes only at the base of the leaf. Tubers look like a small potato (up to about 20cm in size), and will usually be accompanied by a mass of fleshy roots. Tubers develop a single, thick, cylindrical spike with tiny flowers (up to 0.5cm in size), with around 20 - 60 flowers. Flower colour is greeny-yellow with reddish-purple to brown tips, giving the flower spike a resemblance to an asparagus spear. Leaves can be present along the flower spike. It is easiest to identify once the plant starts developing its robust flower spike. Prior to this stage, the plant can look much like native species of Triggerplant (*Stylidium* spp.), which also have purple backed leaves. Flowering season is mainly from Oct – Dec in Victoria. Flowers die back to produce a brown capsule, containing vast quantities of dust like seeds, which are spread by the wind, but can be spread by shoes, clothing and vehicles.



Photo 1- African Weed Orchid, taken by Mel Stagg

Similar in appearance to some native species of orchid, such as Onion-orchids (*Microtis* spp.) or Leek-orchids (*Prasophyllum* spp.), however, these orchids only have a single leaf emerging at the base of the stem. The South African Weed Orchid has multiple.



### Tips:

Plants in the leafy, vegetative stage (before flowers fully develop and open) are susceptible to herbicides, which during the growing phase (while flower spike is developing) also kills the tubers.

Once plant has flowered, the only effectively treatment is manual removal. For manual removal, it is necessary dig out whole plant, including all tubers. Small tubers can exist to quite some depth below soil surface. Ensure to dig down until all are removed. Try to minimise soil disturbance around the plant. Removal is necessary prior to the plant going to seed (at the end of flowering), to prevent further spread. Once removed, all plant material should be securely bagged in a watertight bag and disposed of appropriately (into landfill, not into green waste or compost). Seeds continue to mature even if the flower head is picked.

Photo 2 - African Weed Orchid, pre flowering, taken by Ralph Foster INaturalist Australia



This plant was carefully dug out with a large flat head screwdriver.

Care was taken to ensure last seasons bulb was also removed (image below).



*Photo 3 and 4 – African Weed Orchid, taken by Viviana Halley*

**Habit:**

South African Weed-orchid grows well amongst native grasslands and grassy woodlands. Often found amongst other native orchids.

**Classification:**

Considered an environmental weed (not classified under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act ,1994*)

**Further Information:**

- Agriculture Victoria Invasive and Impact Assessment [South African weed orchid \(Disa bracteata\) | VRO | Agriculture Victoria](#)
- Euroa Arboretum Youtube clip [Weeds – Euroa Arboretum](#)
- Nillumbik Shire Council Youtube clip [Nillumbik African Weed Orchid](#)

