

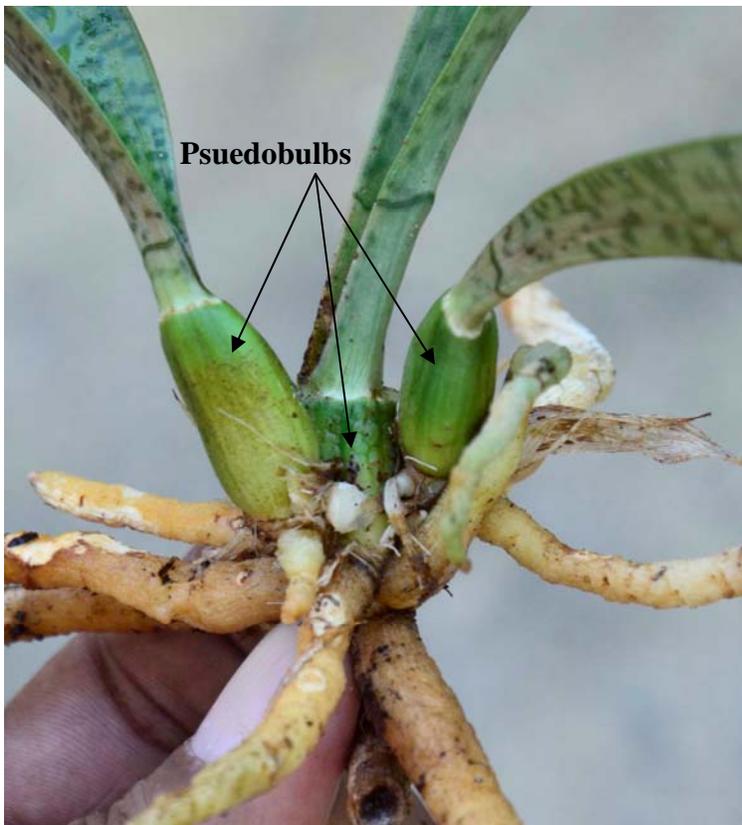
***Oeceoclades maculata*: Monk Orchid**

Oeceoclades maculata, is also known by its common names as monk orchid, ground orchid, and African spotted orchid.

Botanical Description

Monk orchid is a terrestrial or rarely epiphytic herbaceous perennial plant. It appears stemless consisting of a cluster of psuedobulbs (shortened, swollen stems) that give rise to one or two leaves.

The leaf is glossy, green on the front and a lighter green on the back. Both sides of the leaf are heavily mottled dark green. The leaf grows to about 12 inches long and 2 inches wide. The inflorescence is an erect, simple stalk, bearing 5-20 small flowers that open sequentially a few at a time. They are short-lived when compared to the flowers of cultivated orchids. The flowers are about 0.75 inches tall. They have slightly cupped green or greenish pink tepals with a contrasting large lower white “lip” striped with purple lines. At the back of the lip is a small tubular, bulbous-tipped spur (sac-like appendage) that protrudes beneath the lip. The fruit is a ridged green capsule up to 1.2 inches long sometimes with abundant, minute seeds



Three exposed psuedobulbs each with a single leaf, early April



Stemless and with exposed psuedobulbs, late December



Leaf mottling



Emerging plants, mid-November



Flower buds and flowers, mid-September



Fully expanded flowers, mid-September



Comparing flower sizes of typical Vanda hybrid and monk orchid, mid-September



Fruit capsule, late October



Plants in bloom, mid-September



Fruit capsules, late December

Geographical Distribution

The monk orchid has its origin in Western Africa. It is assumed it made the journey to tropical Americas by natural means. It has been known in Brazil as well as parts of the Caribbean since the mid 1800's. It became established in Florida before 1974 either by escaping from cultivation or by expansion from the nearby Caribbean islands. Spreading throughout South Florida, it has rapidly colonized hardwood hammocks near the coast and inland extending to the Everglades' tree islands. It is unable to establish in undisturbed forests. It tolerates light frost, and is found as far north as Alachua County, Florida.

Naturalized Migrant

The monk orchid had once been considered a Florida Category II invasive. It was removed from the [FLEPPC](#) (Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council) invasive list in 2003. Firstly, it may not even be an escapee, but a species that has naturally followed the same winds that brought flamingos and cattle egrets to Florida, which are both considered naturalized migrants to Florida. Secondly, while it may be found in fairly dense colonies in some very shady areas where little else grows, it hardly seems to form a monoculture like other truly invasive weeds.

Growing Conditions

However it got to Florida, it is turning up with increased frequency in wooded areas and shadier landscaped areas. It prefers deep shade and maximum photosynthesis occurs in just 5% sunlight. Leaf chlorosis and reduced growth rate may occur in over 10% sunlight. It grows in limestone soils, leaf litter, decaying wood and in humus-rich soil. It appears to grow best in summer and through fall.



Late October



Plant in natural area, late December

Reproduction

Monk orchid flowers are observed from August through December, peaking in October. The rapid spread may be partially attributed to its self-fertility. On an average, only 50% of the flowers set fruit, but each fruit can produce thousands of microscopic, wind-dispersed, buoyant seeds that are up to 98% fertile. The plants develop rapidly and in favorable conditions can grow from seed to flower in one year. New plants are more apparent in the fall.

References

Langeland, K.A., H.M. McCormick, and K.A. Craddock. 2008. Identification and Biology of Nonnative Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. The University of Florida IFAS Communication Services, Gainesville, FL

Subrahmanyam, P. 2008. [Monk Orchid, African spotted orchid](#). Part of the Florida's Native and Naturalized Orchids website.

Useful Links

[Eulophia graminea](#): A potentially invasive ground orchid

[Carrion flower](#)

[Leafless Beaked Orchid \(*Sacoila lanceolata*\)](#)

[Sansevieria](#)

[Prohibited Plants of Lee County](#)

[Two-Leaf Nightshade](#)

[Air Potato YouTube](#)

[Australian Pine YouTube](#)

[Brazilian Pepper YouTube](#)

[Railroad Vine YouTube](#)

This fact sheet was reviewed by Prem Subrahmanyam, orchid enthusiast; Karen Headlee, Lee County Extension; Pat Rooney, Master Gardener

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