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New Zealand Orchids

Acknowledgements: www.nativeorchids.co.nz

New Zealand has 26 genera of Orchid, consisting of over 160 species. New species are being added to the list as various new varieties are confirmed. Below are some of the types of orchid native to New Zealand.



Greenhood Orchids

There are over 36 species of Greenhood (*Pterostylis*) in NZ.

Their leaves come in a range of shapes and sizes, with grass-like leaves being the most common. Their flowers form a concave hood which, in most species, is usually coloured green with translucent white stripes. They are mainly an orchid of forest and scrub.

The Greenhoods possess a touch sensitive lip. When touched by a small insect, it flips backwards and traps the insect within the flower. The only means of escape is to crawl over the stigma and through a small tunnel, then past the pollen to freedom. The lip usually resets itself again after half an hour.



Sun Orchids

The Sun Orchids only open their flowers in full sun (hence the name), and even then some refuse to open. Flowers range in colour from white through pink to deep blue. The flowers are 1-2cm wide and each plant can have from one to twenty flowers.

They have a single long thin leaf, with the flower stem emerging from the base of the leaf.

Most species of Sun Orchid prefer poor clay soils in open areas amongst scrub. They can also be found on roadside cuttings where they can get a foothold in the clay. *Thelymitra cyanea* is an exception, it grows mostly in swamps and wet areas. More species are found in the north of the country than in the south.



Spider Orchids

Spider Orchids are small shy plants, often found on damp banks or dark areas of the forest floor. Some species can form quite dense colonies that carpet the ground. They have a single oval shaped leaf close to ground level. The solitary flowers of many of the species have very long thin sepals, which give the plants their spider-like appearance.

Most species flower from August to November.

There are still a number of undescribed species currently included within the *Corybas trilobus* aggregate... hopefully they will be sorted out soon to end the current confusion.





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Caladenia Orchids

The Caladenia Orchids are very colourful, and have that distinctive orchid shape. They have a single hairy narrow leaf, with the flower stalk emerging from ground level. They have between one to three flowers that measure 10-20mm across.

Caladenia's are mainly found on poor clay soils amongst scrub and light forest. They flower during spring to early summer in most districts, although flowering can be as late as February in alpine zones.

Three species in the subgenus *Stegostyla* are predominantly found in montane to alpine areas.



Potato Orchids

Potato Orchids (*Gastrodia*) are a saprophytic genus that have no leaves or chlorophyll at all. Instead they have a symbiotic association with a fungus that is parasitic upon a host tree root.

They have large underground tubers that send up a flowering spike which can be covered in up to 40 bell-shaped flowers. Five species have been identified.

The Potato orchids flower over summer, and have become quite common beneath exotic pine forests. They have been known to appear in traffic islands where pine-bark chips are used as a mulch... the seeds apparently coming along with the bark.



Perching Orchids

The perching or epiphytic orchids are the most noticeable of our native orchids. They can be seen on the branches of trees in just about any native forest remnant throughout the country.

There are only eight species of epiphytic orchid, and none have large showy flowers. *Dendrobium cunninghamii* has the largest at 2 - 2.5cm... while the flowers of *Bulbophyllum pygmaeum* are only 2.5mm across.

Fallen trees and branches are the best place to locate the four smaller species. The Bulb-Leaf Orchid (*Bulbophyllum tuberculatum*) is confined almost solely to the upper branches of large forest trees. *Earina* species can occasionally be found growing upon rocks and banks.





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Beard Orchids



The 3 species of Beard Orchid are all uncommon, with one (*Calochilus* aff. *herbaceus*) being very rare, but all are well worth looking hard for. Their hairy labella give them a very unique appearance.

They possess a single long leaf and are very similar in general appearance to a Sun Orchid. The flowers usually open in succession, resulting in only one open flower per stem at a time.

The Brown and Red Beard Orchids prefer poor clay soils or pakihi, and are found mostly in the Rotorua - Taupo region, while the Copper Beard Orchid prefers wet soils along the edges of swamps, and is known only from Auckland northward. Flowering occurs in late spring.



Onion Orchids

The Onion Orchids consist of four known species. *Microtis unifolia* is a particularly abundant species that can be found everywhere from native grasslands to the cracks in street pavements, and even your backyard.

They have a single tubular leaf with the flower stem emerging from about one-third the way up the leaf. Each flower stem has many small flowers about 5mm in size.

There needs to be further investigation into *Microtis unifolia*, as it appears there are a number of different taxa currently included within the *Microtis unifolia* aggregate.



Gnat Orchids

Gnat orchids are small orchids of forest and scrub. They have a single oval or heart-shaped leaf and usually 2-4 flowers. There are four known species.

The Pixie Cap Orchid (*Acianthus*) is a winter flowering species found mostly under light scrub, and is quite common throughout the country.

The two species of *Cyrtostylis* are virtually identical in appearance to one another, and therefore very difficult to distinguish apart. They flower in early spring and are found in open areas amongst scrub. They are not uncommon in some districts.

The Creeping Forest Orchid is found only in damp mossy places amongst subalpine Beech forest. It is found from Mt Ruapehu southward. It is rare in the North Island, and uncommon in the South Island.





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Leek Orchids



There are two types of leek orchid. The two small species (*Genoplesium*) and the four larger species (*Prasophyllum*). They have a single tubular leaf with a single flower spike covered in numerous small flowers.

The species of small leek orchid are found mostly amongst scrub and prefer poor clay soils. They flower from late summer through autumn.

Of the four larger species, one (*Prasophyllum hectorii*) is found solely in swamps, sometimes growing in open water. Whilst the Common Leek Orchid (*Prasophyllum colensoi*) is most commonly found amongst tussock-lands and open areas at higher altitudes, although it can occur as low as sea level in some areas. There are two other species which are currently undescribed.

