

**WEED
PROFILE**



Matthew Baker
Tasmanian Herbarium

South African weed orchid

Disa bracteata Sw. (Orchidaceae)

Synonym: *Monadenia bracteata*

What is it?

Disa bracteata is a terrestrial orchid native to the Cape region of South Africa. It was recently discovered in Tasmania, and is the first example of an exotic orchid taking up residence in the State. It is not new to Australia, it occurs as a weed in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria. In Tasmania, it is known from only one site growing along a roadside near Bridport, in the State's north-east. It is unknown how it arrived there, although it was possibly due to vehicles carrying seed from interstate.

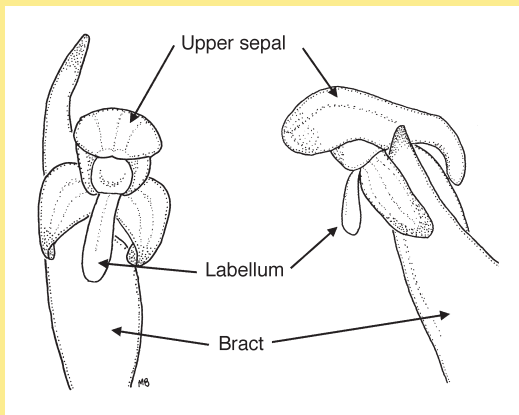
What does it look like?

Disa bracteata is a stout, perennial, terrestrial orchid with underground tubers, growing up to 50 cm, but more commonly to 30 cm tall. The above-ground parts die back in summer and re-emerge in early spring. It flowers from October through to December, and it is during this time that it is most easily recognised. The plant consists of a flower spike which bears up to 60 closely-packed flowers.

Seeds of *Disa bracteata* are microscopic and are easily picked up on clothing and equipment. If plants are found they should not be treated or removed without first seeking specialist advice from a DPIWE weed officer.



Habit of *Disa bracteata*
Photo courtesy of
Gary Backhouse



Individual flowers of *Disa bracteata*

Disa can be easily distinguished from native orchids when flowering as each flower has the following characters:

- An upper sepal with a distinctive backward-pointing basal spur.
- A narrow bright yellow tongue like labellum.
- A prominent leaf-like bract. Bracts in the lower part of the flower spike are much longer than the individual flowers (left), while the bracts in the upper part of the inflorescence are commonly slightly shorter than the flowers (right).

What is its weed potential?

Disa bracteata has many attributes, which allow it to successfully colonise outside of its natural range. These include:

- The ability to self pollinate.
- Each plant can produce vast numbers of microscopic seeds which are readily dispersed over many kilometres by wind and remain viable for up to seven years.
- It is suited to a wide range of habitats from paddocks to bushland, grassland and native heathland, but is more often associated with disturbed situations.
- It tolerates shaded habitats and also grows well in full sun.

Its biggest impacts would be on native vegetation, in particular, out-competing small understorey plants. It is not considered a threat to the agricultural industry.

If you think you may have spotted *Disa bracteata*, please call 1300 368 550 and ask to speak to the Regional Week Management Officer in your area.

This weed profile is an initiative of the Tasmanian Weed Incursion Response Group

