# *Orchis militaris* L.

Military Orchid


***Starting references***

**Family**

Orchidaceae

**IUCN category (2001)**

Vulnerable

**Habit**

Tuberous herb (perennial).

**Habitat**

Grassland, scrub and woodland glades on chalk.

**Reasons for decline**

Habitat destruction and collecting.

**Distribution in wild**

| Country | Locality & Vice County | Sites ($10km^2$ occurences) | Population (plants) |
|---|---|---|---|
| England | W. Suffolk | 1 | ~2,000 |
| | Buckinghamshire | 2 | ~50 |

***Ex situ Collections***

**Gardens close to the region of distribution of the species**

1 Cambridge University Botanic Garden
2 Akely Wood Farmhouse
3 Cliveden (NT)
4 University of Oxford Botanic Garden
5 The Harris Garden
6 Windsor, The Savill & Valley Gardens

**Gardens with specialisation on family Orchidaceae**

B'ham Botanical Gardens
Bristol Zoological Gardens
City of Liverpool Botanic Gardens
Glasgow Botanic Gardens
RHS Wisley
RBG Kew
Spinners
University of Oxford Botanic Garden

**Gardens with specialisation on genus *Orchis***

None

**Potential to grow the species in *ex situ* Collections**

From Plants For A Future

- Propagation

Seed - surface sow, preferably as soon as it is ripe, in the greenhouse and do not allow the compost to dry out. The seed of this species is extremely simple, it has a minute embryo surrounded by a single layer of protective cells. It contains very little food reserves and depends upon a symbiotic relationship with a species of soil-dwelling fungus. The fungal hyphae invade the seed and enter the cells of the embryo. The orchid soon begins to digest the fungal tissue and this acts as a food supply for the plant until it is able to obtain nutrients from decaying material in the soil. It is best to use some of the soil that is growing around established plants in order to introduce the fungus, or to sow the seed around a plant of the same species and allow the seedlings to grow on until they are large enough to move. Division of the tubers as the flowers fade. This species produces a new tuber towards the end of its growing season. If this is removed from the plant as its flowers are fading, the shock to the plant can

stimulate new tubers to be formed. The tuber should be treated as being dormant, whilst the remaining plant should be encouraged to continue in growth in order to give it time to produce new tubers. Division can also be carried out when the plant has a fully developed rosette of leaves but before it comes into flower. The entire new growth is removed from the old tuber from which it has arisen and is potted up, the cut being made towards the bottom of the stem but leaving one or two roots still attached to the old tuber. This can often be done without digging up the plant. The old tuber should develop one or two new growths, whilst the new rosette should continue in growth and flower normally.

- Cultivation

Easily grown on a good loamy soil. Requires a deep rich soil. Prefers a chalky soil. Orchids are, in general, shallow-rooting plants of well-drained low-fertility soils. Their symbiotic relationship with a fungus in the soil allows them to obtain sufficient nutrients and be able to compete successfully with other plants. They are very sensitive to the addition of fertilizers or fungicides since these can harm the symbiotic fungus and thus kill the orchid. This symbiotic relationship makes them very difficult to cultivate, though they will sometimes appear uninvited in a garden and will then thrive. Transplanting can damage the relationship and plants might also thrive for a few years and then disappear, suggesting that they might be short-lived perennials. Cultivated plants often survive for many years, though they rarely multiply. Plants can succeed in a lawn in various parts of the country. The lawn should not be mown early in the year before or immediately after flowering. Plant out bulbs whilst the plant is dormant, preferably in the autumn. Bulbs can also be transplanted with a large ball of soil around the roots when they are in leaf, they are impatient of root disturbance. Plants seem to be immune to the predations of rabbits.

***Conservation information***

*Orchis militaris* is listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981

**Linkages to BAPs**

Suffolk LBAP
Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes BAP.
Cambridgeshire BAP

**Habitat Management**

Conservation management has been directed towards keeping the canopy open in woodland glades, controlling shrubs and removing moss.
Protected sites are listed on http://www.searchnbn.net

**Conservation programmes**

Unknown

**Web References**

- NBN Gateway database: http://www.searchnbn.net
- Plants For A Future Database: http://www.ibiblio.org/pfaf/cgi-bin/arr_html?Orchis+militaris