

Orchidaceae, the orchid family, is one of the species richest families of seed plants that have long in fascinated plant lovers. It is composed of five subfamilies, 880 genera and more than 25,000 species distributed throughout the world in the world. Many orchid species are having high horticultural and commercial value. They exhibit an incredible range of diversity in size, shape, colour and well known for their long lasting and beautiful flowers. The family is represented by more than 1300 species belonging to 186 genus in India. The Indian Himalayan and Western Ghats are the most species rich regions of our country. More than 963 species belonging to 170 genera are represented in Indian Himalayan Region (IHR).

Depending upon the growth habits, Orchids are known as either Sympodial Orchids: when it produces new shoot or a new bulb on the lateral side of the stem, e.g., Dendrobium sp., Bulbophyllum sp., Catleya sp., Cymbidium sp. etc. or Monopodial Orchids; when it grows with a single stem without producing any lateral shoots, e.g., Vanda sp., Thrixspermum sp., Gastrochilus sp. etc.

Based on their natural habitat, Orchids are also divided into 4 types:

Epiphytes: These orchids naturally grow on tree trunks, branches and twigs, e.g., Bulbophyllum, Dendrobium, Eria, Vanda, Liparis etc.

Terrestrial: These orchids grow on the soil in humid and shady places, e.g., Phaius, Calanthe, Arundina, Paphiopedilum, Spathoglottis, Goodyera, Zeuxine etc.

Myco-heterotroph: These orchids grow on decomposed wood material on dense shady forest floors, e.g., Aphyllorchis, Epipogium, Galeola, Gastrodia, Didymoplexis etc.

Lithophytes: These orchids grow on moss covered rocks in shady forest areas, e.g., Cheirostylis, Paphiopadillum etc.

Economic Importance: The most magnificently beautiful flowers, elegant colours, unique shapes, curious ornamentation and prolonged self-life make Orchids one of the most sought after flowering plants. These are grown as ornamentals throughout the world by amateurs to professionals; florists to horticulturists, as indoor cut flower plants to commercial cash crops. Today orchid cultivation is a multi-million dollar industry. In India, Orchid are grown commercially in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and other North-eastern states. Not only is that, Orchids also used as one of the active ingredients in traditional health care system as well as in the Ayurvedic formulations of many medicines. Threats Due to habitat destruction, fragmentation, unscientific over exploitation, non-availability of pollinators, and many natural as well as manmade interferences, population of many wild orchids are dwindling in their natural habitat.

Conservations: Orchids are of great importance mainly in horticulture and floriculture. Species like Dendrobium, Paphiopedilum, Papalionanthe, Phalaenopsis, Spathogloris, etc. attract large tourists and horticulturist. Ex-situ conservation of orchids in various gardens and in-situ conservation by declaring gene sanctuary to various species rich areas are urgent need of the hour. Strict enforcement of laws, stringent action against illegal trade and exploitation of Orchids need to be ensured on priority basis for posterity.



