

Margaret Bradford - Native Orchids

Margaret Bradford spoke at our September 2002 gathering and provided information on the growth habits of orchids and her experiences as a regenerator dealing with orchids.

It is good to know that there are many species of orchids which can still be found in our bushland reserves, and of course bush regenerators are going to come across them from time to time. Orchids can be found in all kinds of habitats - rainforest, heathland, open forest, grassland, swamps, by the sea or inland, and in either moist or dry conditions.

The problem with orchids (for bush regenerators anyway), is that because most terrestrial orchids have a dormant period, they are not always visible, and it may not be until someone comes to you with a handful of little white potato-like tuberoids, and says "what are these?" that you even know that they are there.

Most terrestrial orchids (with the exception of *Cryptostylis* species which are evergreen), have a dormant period when they remain underground (mostly during the summer months). The leaves and flowering stem start to fade soon after flowering finishes and they live off nutrients stored in their underground tuberoids during their dormant period. After good autumn rains, the plants sprout, the leaves and flowering stem grow and the cycle begins again. The flowering period is relatively short, ranging from a few days in some cases to several weeks for others. It often depends on how soon an insect pollinates the flowers as to how long they remain in flower.

As a result of all this and because orchids are probably only really noticed when they are in flower, I think it is a good idea for bush regenerators to be able to recognize the leaves of orchids.

In Lilli Pilli Reserve (in Sutherland Shire in the south of Sydney) we have often cleared rock outcrops completely when they have been covered in dense mats of asparagus, thinking that it is easier in the long run for bush regenerators to have cleared rock surfaces. However, it has been noticed that when the asparagus root system has been left on the rock (after being killed), that there are now terrestrial orchids and other seedlings regenerating naturally. Either there has been a seed bank there, or the root system has provided a suitable bed for seeds to develop. Obviously this would not be a consideration in all situations, but is worth thinking out.

Try to avoid having Council mowing men or sprayers in areas where orchids grow!

Margaret Bradford