

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**The Orchids of Crete (Part 17): genus *Dactylorhiza* (Finger root)**
Roman *Dactylorhiza*, *Dactylorhiza romana* (Sebastiani) Soó

So far we introduced **59 Orchid types** of Crete with our leaflet series “**The Orchids of Crete**” (Part 1- 16); therefore see at http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/NLUK_en.htm [Navigator rubric **Botanical**].

The **Roman *Dactylorhiza*** (or Roman marsh orchid, Syn. *Dactylorhiza sulphurea*) is in the genus *Dactylorhiza* in the group *sambucina-romana*, they are perennial, herbaceous plants with tubers as outlive organ

The most common German name “Knabekraut” (boy herb) arose when the present genus *Orchis*- and *Dactylorhiza* together formed the genus *Orchis* L. It is still used for the genus *Dactylorhiza*. However, to separate from the genus *Orchis* L., the name “Finger root” is occasional used. “Finger root” is the metaphor of the botanical name. The name *Dactylorhiza* is derived from Greek words δάκτυλος "daktylos" (finger) and ρίζα "rhiza" (root), referring to the palmately two- to five-lobed tubers of this genus.

The tubers of *Orchis*- and *Dactylorhiza* species and some other orchids were formerly known as slime drug ("Tubera Salep") applied in Paediatrics in irritation of the digestive tract, when there still was no better medication and therapeutic remedies. Today orchids are no longer considered as effective medicinal herbs. More importantly all kinds of the genus *Orchis* and *Dactylorhiza* are protected, in particular relating to the underground parts of plants.

Generally valid for the **genus** is a growth height of 15 to 35 centimeters. The flowers are whitish, pale yellow or even magenta colour. The four to seven down-to-Earth leaves are not patched. The lateral sepals are turned to the outside; the medium is together with the upper petals in a helmet leant forward. The labium is tripartite and convex curved outward. The spur is slightly longer than the ovary. Grows on dry soil and sparse forests at altitudes up to 2000 m. It is widespread in the Mediterranean and the Middle East; in the East to the Crimea and Syria; Heyday: March to June.

The **Roman *Dactylorhiza*** occurs on Crete, apart from the central East, in evenly spaced habitats over the whole island, where the South is slightly weaker represented.

The plant has a basal rosette of narrow, lanceolate leaves. The flowers are red, pink, white or yellow, and all transitions. The labium shows a long, strong, upwardly spur which is considerably longer than the ovary. **Flowering season:** end of March to mid April. **Habitat:** on acidophilous surface, often growing in brush areas with broom. Hybrids are not expected in Crete due to missing potential crossing partners. **Plant find spot:** Xidas (04/09/1990), Pictures: © G. Blaich

Protection and endangerment: by law (EG) No. 605/2006 (Appendix B)



Finally some pictures of the **Roman Dactylorhiza** (from the Mediterranean area) from *Günther Blaich*; we here once again thank for permission to use his photos in our info documents. Plant find spots / exposure date from left to right: Croatia (04/06/2006), Cypress (03/03/1997) and Sicilian (04/07/1998).



The following pictures show colour varieties of the **Roman Dactylorhiza** photographed by *G. Blaich* in 2000 in Tuscany.



Further pictures and short descriptions can be found at: [http://www.grabner-orchideen.com/kreta/fs_da_rom.htm]. Detailed information's about the genus can be found at: [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dactylorhiza>]