

## **Queensland Floral Emblem -Dendrobium bigibbum**

Dendrobium bigibbum, commonly known as the Cooktown orchid or Mauve Butterfly Orchid. It occurs in tropical North Queensland, Australia and New Guinea.

Dendrobium bigibbum is an orchid that grows either on trees (epiphytic) or on rocks (lithophytic). It has long, cane-like stems called pseudobulbs, which range from about 20 cm to over a metre long and can be green or slightly purple around the edges. Each stem carries three to five thick, oval leaves that are around 10–15 cm long.

When the plant blooms, it produces arching flower spikes up to 40 cm long, each holding anywhere from a couple to as many as twenty flowers. These flowers are usually lilac-purple, although pinkish or bluish forms sometimes appear.

The flowers themselves vary in size depending on the variety, generally spreading 3–7 cm across. The sepals (the outer flower segments) are shaped like narrow ovals, with the top one standing upright or slightly bent back, while the two lower ones spread widely apart. The lip of the flower has three parts: two small upright side lobes and a wider middle lobe that has four or five raised ridges and a small hairy area in the centre. This orchid usually flowers from February through to July, producing colourful displays during late summer, autumn, and early winter.

Commercially cultivated plants like a dry, sunny position with a minimum of watering and a temperature that does not fall below 13 °C (55 °F). Specimens need a bush-house in cooler climates.

Dendrobium bigibbum is listed as "vulnerable" under the Australian Government *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. It is illegal to collect the Cooktown orchid from its natural environment without a licence. The main threats to the species are "settlement and visitor pressures", inappropriate fire regimes and illegal collection.