

Cypripedium calceolus L.



Cypripedium calceolus growing wild (Austria)

The fascinating Lady's Slipper orchid can be found in every European country except Greece. Its distribution outside Europe includes eastern Siberia, temperate boreal Asia, central China and the (Russian) Sakhalin Island in the Pacific Ocean.

Based on studies with nuclear DNA markers the individual plants are genetically identical over the whole of their distribution range. Phenotypically quite similar species can be found in North America (including Mexico), however they are genetically somewhat different.



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Cypripedium calceolus has declined in most of Europe mostly due to being uprooted by gardeners and orchid-fans, but is still widespread in Austria and in certain localities may even occur abundantly.

It is now legally protected as a “plant of European interest” (Natura 2000, the Habitats Directive).



Cypripedium calceolus growing wild (Austria)

Cypripedium calceolus grows up to 30cm (stem) with one or two slipper-shaped flowers. It prefers lime-rich soil in semi shade woodlands and scrubs at elevations from close to sea level up to 2700 meters. In Austria *Cypripedium calceolus* starts growing in mid-April and flowers appear in May. The flowering period ends in June, but leaves and seedpods can still be seen in October or even November. Only the rhizomes survive the winter season.

In natural habitats time from emergence of this orchid species, after an up to 4 years subterranean post germination phase to flowering, may take fourteen years or more. It is difficult to determine the maximal age of individual plants because they can reproduce vegetatively. However the lifespan has been reported to extend from 30 to 100 years, with the oldest one being estimated 192 years in Estonia;

A. and S. Harrap: „Orchids of Britain and Ireland“, A&C Black Publishers, London, 2005.

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