

Southern Flora



In the Carnic and Gailtal Alps the neighborhood to the sunny and warm Mediterranean is not only expressed by good weather but also by a remarkable richness and diversity of the vegetation.

When the ice started to melt at the end of the last ice age some 18.000 years ago and a new soil developed, undemanding plants were the first to migrate into these cold regions. With increasing temperatures birch and pine trees appeared which were followed by shadowing bushes and woods. Some 9.000 years before present the spruce and different leaf trees started their victory accompanied little later by the fir tree und red beech.

In the Gail Valley the composition of the forests was strongly changed by man since the 9th century BC (Hallstatt Age). Due to forest clearance by mining and agriculture birch and spruce trees were repressed and space for crop and herbage was provided. In Carinthia such activities were already practiced in the Younger Stone Age. Since the Middle Ages extensive clear-cutting changed the natural to a cultural landscape for agriculture and grazing purposes. The present situation of the forests with their high number of spruce trees resulted from forestry measures since the 19th century.

Background: Above the valley floor north of the Gail Valley the vegetation is sparser compared to the southern side due to dryness. The northern Carnic Alps are dominated by mixed birch and fir forests. Only the spruce opens the pure stand to a certain degree. These trees are accompanied by Waldmeister, Sanikel, Goldnessel and Bingelkraut as well as by invading plants from the south like ätterige Anemone, Großblütige Taubnessel, Armonie, Fünfblättriger Zahnwurz, sometimes Alpen Mannstreu, Akelei, Lamarcks Eisenhut, Gärrewurz, Krainer Lilie and others. Black berries are very abundant, they like the shaly subsoil.

At an altitude of some 1100 m the birch decreases giving way to the spruce tree. Dreiblättrige Anemone is still present and Waldbrandlattich, Stinkender Hainsalat, Heidel- und Preiselbeere, Rippenfarn und Wolliges Reitgras accompany the spruce tree. At some 1500 m altitude the larch tree replaces the spruce tree. Trollblume, Legföhre, Zwergwacholder, Frühlingssheide, Seidelbast and different alpine roses now determine the flora at the timber line. At this altitude the Alpenrose occurs frequently.

The green alder zone represents the ideal setting for the blue flower of Carinthia named Wulfenia which only occurs in the Naßfeld area and as a subspecies also in Montenegro, Albania and the Himalayas. It is mostly regarded as a forgotten relict of Tertiary laurel forests. Best examples of this interesting flower can be found near Watschig, Kühweg and Garnitzen Alm.

A mostly protected sea of flowers represents the alpine Gasheden Stufe in an altitude between 2000 and 2500 m. Between Blaugrasmaten and Postseggengrasen everything is flowering on the limestone subsoil, e.g. Großblütiger Erzian, Aukel (Petersstamm), Alpen Mannstreu, Frauenschuh, Kohlröschen, Alpenaster, Edelweiß, Anika, many Gockelblumen, Bartschke, Tafelschale, Storchenschabel, different species of Steinbrech, Küchenschelle and Silberwurz. As at other altitudes and settings, the majority of the flowers migrated from southern Europe into this space.

On the mountain Mussen north of Kötschach a rich collection of flowers are growing at an altitude between 1560 and 1900 m, e.g. the Trichter- or Paradieslilie, Krainer Lilie, Türkerbündelie, Heller Primel, Buser-Steinbrech, Karrer Alpenorchis, Blau Märdale, Gold Märdale, Krusten-Steinbrech, Silber-Tafelschale, Dachiger Erzian, Langhörn-Läusekraut, Wöhrner Gänsekresse and other. The richness and variety of different flowers is overwhelming during June and July.