*Stelis* Swartz

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ETYMOLOGY: Greek for little pillar or mistletoe. A term used by the ancient Greeks for mistletoe, which has a similar tree growing habit as this genus.

LECTOTYPE: *Stelis purpurea* (Ruiz and Pavon)Willdenow

Over five hundred sympodial epiphytes, lithophytes or terrestrials are found in low to upper elevation, hill scrub, swamps and montane cloud forests, distributed from the southeastern United States to Trinidad, the Guianas, Venezuela, Mexico to Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina with the greatest diversity found in moist habitats of the upper Andes. These species are some of the most taxonomically complex of all the orchids but are of little horticultural merit because of the customarily small or minute, flat-faced, usually translucent, often dull-colored flowers in shades of white, green or purple. Many species are light sensitive, opening only when exposed to the right amount of sunlight, and then closing tightly during the night. These small plants have tufted stems have horizontal creeping rhizomes (the primary stem), and erect, slender stems, each with a solitary, elliptical to oblong fleshy to leathery leaf. The several, slender, few to numerous flowered inflorescences have minute to small flowers. There are some strictly nocturnal blooming species that close during the day. The usually spreading dorsal sepal is the most prominent segment. The minute petals and tiny, entire or trilobed lip (fleshy, often hairy) surround the short, stout to slender, erect, footless column (sometimes the column itself is obscure), and some species have segments with hairy margins. The lip is hinged to the column base or the lip base is attached to the base of column foot sometimes by a thin strap.