



American Orchid Society
Education. Conservation. Research.

Beginner's Newsletter

June 24, 2009

Welcome to the AOS Beginner's Newsletter. We will be sending you monthly tips on how to grow orchids and help you get them to bloom again. In addition to the information presented here, we invite you to visit the AOS website at www.aos.org and check out the information found under ORCHID INFORMATION > ORCHID BASICS.



STEP ONE Identify Your Orchid

Before you can determine how to care for your orchid, you must first be able to identify what kind of orchid you have. Most people who have just a few orchids will have a "moth orchid" or *Phalaenopsis* (fail-eh-NOP-sis) like the plant shown at left.

Although *Dendrobium* (den-DROH-bee-um) is a very large and wide-spread genus, several types have impacted the pot plant market. These are popular because they are very floriferous and flowers can last several weeks. Easily encountered are plants that look like the one shown at right: miniature "Phalaenopsis-type" *Dendrobium* hybrids.



Another popular house-plant genus is *Paphiopedilum* (paff-ee-oh-PED-ih-lum) or lady slipper orchid. Like *Phalaenopsis*, *Paphiopedilum* plants have long-lived flowers. They are characterized by a slipper-like pouch and look like these to the left. These Asian lady slippers are related to the native American lady slipper orchids.

Plants in the *Oncidium* family often have flowers that resemble dancing ladies. Many plants in this group have very complex intergeneric backgrounds and a wide range of colors and shapes. The flowers are also long lived and plants can be found in big box stores and garden centers. Some examples look like these to the right.



Although less common as pot plants, cattleyas or hybrids from the *Cattleya* (CAT-lee-ah) family may very well have caught your eye - or nose! Many of these plants have delightful fragrances and can be irresistible. Cattleyas come in many sizes, shapes and colors on both big and small plants but can be recognized by their generally symmetrical flowers.

In California, the genus *Cymbidium* (sym-BID-ee-um) is favored as a house and garden plant. *Cymbidiums* have large lily-like leaves that can be broad or narrow like this warmth-tolerant *Cymbidium* Golden Elf.



In Florida *Vanda* (VAN-duh) orchids and hybrids made from vandas are very popular because of their rainbow of colors and frequency of flowering. Vandas look like this *Vanda* (*Euanthe*) *sanderiana* shown at left.

If you have *Phalaenopsis* orchids, they probably are either finished blooming, or the flowers are close to fading. Where to cut a *Phalaenopsis* inflorescence, or flower spike, is the #1 most frequently-asked question. This video will show you how.





Did You Know?

Vanilla comes from an orchid! *Vanilla planifolia* is known as the "orchid of commerce". It was first used by the Aztecs to flavor chocolate. Vanilla beans are the dried seed pods of this orchid. (Reinikka, Merle, A History of the Orchid, Timber Press, Portland Oregon, 1995.)

Resources



Do you know about the [AOS Culture Sheets](#)?

These popular documents have been at the foundation of AOS orchid education for more than a decade and provide convenient orchid culture information. Updated and available in several languages, a baker's dozen genera are covered in a concise and consistent format. At the bottom of each webpage culture sheet are links to PDF versions that print perfectly on a business-sized sheet of paper. Print them all and make your own basic culture booklet.

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ORCHIDS magazine upcoming features...

July - Visit the habitat of the legendary "Ghost Orchid" (*Dendrophylax lindenii*) deep in the heart of Florida's steamy Corkscrew Swamp and then learn how one grower succeeded growing this challenging orchid so well that he received a coveted First Class Certificate from AOS judges in North Carolina.

August - Vanda Trifecta; Score with Vandas in Any Climate

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