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*Psychopsis papilio*

# HOW TO BUILD AN ORCHID COLLECTION

CAROL SIEGEL

ORCHID CLUBS love new members. Though clueless, they radiate the infatuation and thrill of the early orchid addiction. Clutching their three Home Depot orchids, the new members overflow with giddy enthusiasm and optimism. They enter their first orchid meeting like the devoted entering a church, starry-eyed at the plants in bloom and salivating over the plants for sale. They will buy anything in bloom... anything... even if it doesn't have a tag (or roots); it doesn't even have to be cheap. The new members buy orchids like they are falling in love. Their hearts race at the sight of the breathtaking beauty, and their heads go on sabbatical as their lust to possess flattens their wallets. Misty-eyed, they buy without thinking.

Fast forward five years and those now-no-longer-new-members have an orchid area stuffed with bedraggled plants they won in raffles during their first days as members when the orchids were very small and the new members didn't know better. The orchids are now so big that they dream of trading them in for something more to their taste. Out of room but still in love, they want an orchid collection that reflects their growing sophistication and knowledge of orchids.

This article is intended to help you declutter your overflowing orchid area to create more room to buy more satisfying orchids with a plan in mind.

Today, it is possible for anyone to build an orchid collection with a computer and a little money. You can put an orchid in your shopping cart at a supermarket, right next to your pork chops and toilet paper, for less than \$20. It was not always that way. Until quite recently, an orchid collection was a status symbol for the extremely rich, the equivalent of buying a new Lamborghini or a lakefront home. The man who purportedly started Orchidmania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Cavendish, the Sixth Duke of Devonshire, had an income in today's dollars of seven million dollars a year. It is the stuff of legends that the Duke caught the orchid bug in 1833 at a Horticultural Society exhibition. He was so smitten with a specimen of *Psychopsis papilio* that he paid the equivalent of \$10,000 for it (I bought mine for \$18) and immediately decided to devote his life to orchids. The Duke of Devonshire then bought 300 plants from Duke John Huntley's collection for the equivalent of \$75,000 and built 33 glass houses to house his growing collection. His famous Great Conservatory was the most impressive glass structure in the world in 1840. It was a temple devoted to flowers, with 200,000 sq ft of growing space under an enormous elliptical roof that took 500 workers four years to build. It was so big that Queen Victoria went through the front doors in her carriage with horses. It cost over three million in today's dollars and had various microclimates to house plants from around the world. Exotic birds flew overhead, silver fish swam in great pools, and rock

crystals gleamed everywhere among the exotic trees, flowers, and, especially, orchids. Charles Darwin was so impressed with the collection that he said he was "transported with delight." Cavendish financed orchid trips to India with John Gibson, his personal Indiana Jones. The Duke was unlikely to run out of room, time, or money to devote to his beloved orchids.

## Saying Goodbye to Orchids That No Longer Thrill You

Unless you are a very special orchid grower, you and the Duke have little in common save a love of orchids. He didn't run out of room, but you may have. Assuming that you have finite space and now find yourself out of room, the most painful part of making an orchid plan is to go through your orchids and cull those you no longer want. Since orchid collections grow exponentially, and sometimes we just keep buying and watering them without really examining them, this is the time to examine your plants. Dispose of those diseased, infested with pests, or struggling to survive. See if a plant has some good roots, live eyes (dormant growth buds) on pseudobulbs, and strong, healthy leaves—if not, get rid of it. Sometimes, we hang on to a plant in the vain hope that it will have a miraculous recovery. It is hard to revive the nearly dead. Be heartless. These need to go in the trash. Avoid giving these to others or donating them to your club. Nobody wants or needs "hopeless." Ruthlessly get rid of your stinky bloomers, sickly growers, and ugly flowers.

If you are well along in your hobby, consider discarding orphan plants without a tag. You can bring them to a meeting to donate, but they are useless in hybridizing or winning awards. Few orchid hybrids are distinctive enough to be identified without a tag. They make good gifts for non-orchid growers when they are in bloom.



Healthy orchid roots

Dead, diseased, orphaned—these are easy to eliminate. Then, it gets harder. Sometimes, you have many of the same things, and they no longer interest or excite you as they once did. Give duplicates away; they make good gifts or donations. Most difficult, go through your collection and eliminate decent but unexciting ones. Your taste may have evolved, and you may no longer want 50 phalaenopsis. If you rid your collection of plants you have outgrown as your taste has evolved, you will have room for new ones that excite you now. You can sell, donate, or trade your duplicates. In addition, perhaps one of your plants has gotten too big and needs to be divided. Members will covet your divisions.

Ken Slump wrote a clever article on the art of culling orchids, subtitled “Improving Your Collection Through the Careful Process of Elimination.” As he cleverly says:

Every collection should be viewed as a work in progress. The goal should be to assemble a healthy collection of the highest quality possible. Since most of us have a limited amount of space and time to devote to our orchids, we owe it to ourselves to grow only those we really like and that perform well for us. Make space to acquire more.

## Make More Room

I like “making more room.” It means you can have more orchids without throwing anything out. You can, of course, try to make more space for your orchids. Perhaps you can free up a window in a guest room or get your mate to spring for a fancy new greenhouse or shade area. Maybe you could put a table in front of a patio door or kitchen window that doesn’t sport a sill. You could buy more light carts or enclose a patio. Downs Matthews (1983) wrote a helpful article detailing how you can wring more space out of your existing setup. He suggests relocating supplies like pots and media outside prime growing areas. Among his ingenious ideas is to use vertical space above your aisles and benches by hanging plants from the ceiling and adding mesh to the sides and backs of carts to hang more plants in wasted space.

Downs suggests using tiered step benches that use the same square feet but can accommodate one-third more plants. Nurseries often use carts side by side that can separate when a wheel is turned to allow you to care for the plants but use every inch of space. He suggests looking for walls or fences that could hold a mini-greenhouse.

However, with 29,000 plus orchid species and hundreds of thousands of gorgeous hybrids out there, you will eventually have to choose. You just can’t keep buying orchids without thinking. You will inevitably run out of space, time, or money. I started with one orchid cart, and now I have ten. I would have more, but I finally realized I only have time to care for this many. I really can’t afford any more electric bills, water bills, or impulsive buying. I like to and must do other things

besides tending to an ever-expanding orchid hobby. Eventually, you must start planning and choosing. Everybody eventually does.

## Considerations for Developing Your Orchid Collection

In *Orchid Digest*, Doug Overstreet (2009) discussed considerations in planning an orchid collection. It is important to consider the time you have to devote to your orchids, the money you can spend, and the growing conditions you can provide.

### Time

Orchids are like babies. Everyone loves babies; they are adorable. But just as there is no such thing as a diaper-free baby or a self-feeding infant, your orchid babies will require a great deal of time, often much more time than you anticipate. You will have to water, stake, pot, fertilize, and prune your plants, tasks which are time- and attention-consuming. How much time can you give your plants? You may not have unlimited time if you are busy working and having a family. It is better to have a dozen plants that you have time to examine for insects and diseases, to water thoroughly and stake, and to repot and fuss over than to have 100 plants that you have little time to care for. An orchid collection does not have to be big to be a collection. It just has to please you and be suitable for your time constraints. I spend fifteen minutes a day just enjoying my orchids, an hour twice a week watering my plants, and days and days twice a year repotting my plants. I spend at least two or three hours a week reading about orchids and perusing the web. I am retired. Do you want to devote that time to your orchids? Can you?

### Cost

Orchids are an expensive hobby. I live in the desert and grow under LED lights in ten carts with a humidifier, an air conditioner, many fans, and deionized water tanks; I can grow orchids like cattleyas that would not suit my desert window conditions. I provide 75-80% humidity and a temperature of 75 degrees in the summer. However, you must be willing to pay for air conditioning, lights, light carts, fans, a humidifier, and deionized water-exchange tanks. How much can you afford to spend buying and caring for your orchids? Decide how much you are willing to spend on pots, potting mixes, orchid purchases, fertilizers, insecticides, heating, cooling humidity, ventilation, greenhouse construction, and maintenance. An exceptional \$2,500 orchid may just be out of reach for you, no matter how much you want it. Be realistic and build your collection with these facts in mind.

## Growing Conditions

Be honest about the limitations of your growing conditions. If you have only one window, plan your collection with that in mind. You need to know what can be accomplished with your conditions. Select plants you can successfully grow in your growing area, whether it be a windowsill, under lights, or in your greenhouse. A greenhouse offers more microclimates and allows you to grow a variety of plants. You can select plants that fit the conditions you have regarding light, temperature, or humidity. Alternatively, you can modify your environment and create conditions that suit the orchids you want to grow with humidifiers, air conditioners, supplemental lights, or such.

One of the best ways to know what plants are best for you to collect is to see what plants have succeeded under the conditions you can provide. If phalaenopsis do well in your conditions, buy more or other low-light, warm-growing genera. If all your mini-plants dry out and die, consider collecting bigger plants that don't need to be watered as often. My friend Diana has an automatic watering system that drenches her minis every day. Growing under lights, I can't do that without electrocuting myself. I can't grow mini-orchids successfully. You need to know what can be accomplished in your conditions and be guided by that. You wouldn't buy three racehorses and expect them to do well in your one-bedroom apartment. However, you might do well with orchids and a few exotic fish in an aquarium.

As J. N. Rentoul says in his *The Specialist Orchid Grower* (1987), "Success with a particular plant, whether by chance or design, may persuade you to increase a section of your pastime into specialist culture. Each genus needs its environment, and whether it is the odontoglossum in a cool climate or phalaenopsis or vandas in warmer regions, the best thing to do is follow the indicators."

## Develop a Wish List

One of the good ways to know what to buy is to keep a notebook handy when society members show and tell. If you see a plant that knocks your socks off, ask about the growing conditions, when it typically blooms, where it was bought, and how much it cost, and add the plant to your "wish list." Note, especially the month it blooms if you want orchids to bloom year-round. Now, you have an orchid that you would eventually like to possess. You are starting to have a plan.

If a speaker comes to your club, notice if your heart races when he talks about dendrobiums or cattleyas. Does this excite you? Write down the orchids you would like to have and question the speaker about their cost, availability, and ease of growing.

Also, if you go to an orchid show and see a dozen plants that you really must have but can't afford all at once, record the name of the plant, who was selling it, and the season it was blooming. Question the vendor as

to whether it would grow in your conditions, whether it is a fuss-budget plant or an easy-to-grow delight. Hopefully, he will give you accurate information. Concentrate on eventually acquiring your wish list orchids as soon as they become available. You will then have a collection of "must haves" you really must have!

## Different Kinds of Collection

Remember when planning your collection that you can still buy an orchid because you like it. You can still make an impulse purchase or buy a ridiculously expensive orchid because it is your birthday. The wish list is just a guideline. YOU are the judge of what belongs in your collection. You can devote a portion of your collection to one, two, or three things that excite you. It can be one-color orchids like white, orchids from one country, orchids that bloom in a particular month, orchids that are mounted or tiny, or perhaps orchids from a particular genus or subfamily. There are "snob" growers who recommend you only buy awarded plants, but if you don't care about that, don't be limited to somebody else's preferences. Not everyone needs to wear designer clothes. One speaker came to my house and looked disdainfully at my orchids. "I can't believe you grow hybrids," he said. He thought species were the only desirable thing to grow. I was just starting, and I didn't know a species from a hybrid. I just wanted big and gorgeous. Remember, as the years go by, your finances or growing conditions improve, or your taste changes, you can modify your collection to suit the new you.

Make sure you read everything you can about orchids. For every plant you buy, read a book or orchid magazine. Go to the internet, which is a great reference tool. Research plants you like and see if they are a good candidate for your growing area. Learn about their cultural needs. Go slowly at first; I suggest you limit your collection to no more than three kinds initially so you can become an expert.

## Starting a Collection that is of Personal Interest to You

It is always fun to collect orchids with special meaning for you. If your family is from Mexico, maybe you would like to collect orchids that grow in Mexico. If you have enjoyed traveling in Brazil, perhaps you would like to collect as many of their native orchids or hybrids as you can find and can afford. I have written dozens of articles for *Orchid Digest*. I try to include in my orchid collection as many of the orchids I have written about over the years as I can afford and locate. It gives me great pleasure to possess orchids I have researched. Because I now know a lot about these orchids, they seem like old friends to me and give me great pleasure to care for.



©Ron Parsons, grower Ken Jacobsen

*Myrmecophila thomsoniana*

For example, I wrote an article for *Orchid Digest* on orchids as national flowers. It prompted me to want to collect the orchids I had discussed and researched. For example, I collected its national flower, *Myrmecophila thomsoniana*, from the Cayman Islands. It is known as the Banana Orchid because its pseudobulbs look like bunches of bananas; it grows on mahogany and ironwood trees and is pollinated by beetles and guarded by anole lizards, which lick its nectar.

In addition, I collected *Lycaste virginalis* (formerly *Lyc. skinneri*), the national flower of Guatemala. It is such a lovely orchid with more than fifty color varieties. Only one in 200 *Lyc. virginalis* are white and often called the “white nun” orchid for its resemblance to a nun’s cap. I have tried to collect as many color varieties as I could.

In addition, I bought *Prosthechea cochleata*, the Clam Orchid, the national flower of Belize, an upside down (non-resupinate) orchid that looks like a shell. Do not cut off the spike since it will keep blooming for a long time.

I collected *Rhyncholaelia digbyana* from Honduras with its lemony scent and curly lip. It has given its curly lip to many of its hybrids. The first in 1889 was *Rhyncholaeliocattleya* Mossiae-Digbyana ‘Empress of Russia,’ (*Rhyncholaelia digbyana* × *Cattleya mossiae*), which the Empress of Russia gave to her sister for her birthday. I like to collect other of its hybrids with curly lips. They are just so spectacular.

I also loved the national flower of Panama, *Peristeria elata*, the Dove Orchid, with its four-foot inflorescence carrying as many as 20 flowers that look like little white doves. I especially love the pseudobulbs that are as big as softballs, which makes this orchid interesting even when out of bloom.

I have many more of the national flowers I wrote about. You, too, can collect orchids from a genus, species, or color that interests you or means something just to you.



©Ron Parsons, grower Roberta Fox

*Prosthechea cochleata*



©Ron Parsons, grower Jay Vanmimi

*Lycaste virginalis*



©Eric Hunt, grower the Atlanta Botanic Garden

*Peristeria elata*



©Ron Parsons, grower Ramon de los Santos

*Rhyncholaelia digbyana*



*Cattleya purpurata* 'Hot Times'



*Cattleya purpurata* f. roxo-violeta 'Palco 400'



*Cattleya Pacavia* (*purpurata* × *tenebrosa*)

## Buy All the Varieties of a Species that Thrill You

You might decide to collect varieties and hybrids of just one species that delights you. For example, year after year, I was thrilled by the gorgeous blooms of the showy and vigorous orchid *Cattleya purpurata* (formerly *Laelia*) 'Queen of Spring' from Brazil. Blooming for me without fail, even under my LED lights, in Las Vegas in June and July, it thrilled me with gorgeous sprays of big, colorful flowers on a strong, erect stem and thriving plant. I decided to collect as many varieties and hybrids of this magnificent orchid as I could afford.

A typical plant is massive and can be up to two to three feet tall, with an average of 18 inches. Make sure to spend the money to buy a mature plant since it takes a long time for this species to flower. This unifoliate orchid makes growths in late summer and fall and needs to be repotted at this time rather than in spring as for most cattleyas. One advantage is that the rhizome is short and does not outgrow the pot quickly, so even a big specimen requires less space on the bench. The orchid usually blooms for me on more than one stem, and each stem boasts three to six large flowers, making a drop-dead gorgeous display. There are more than 100 color varieties, from lavender to white, white with dark red, purple, blue, or pink lips.

I tried to collect as many color varieties as I could find and could afford. In Brazil, they have orchid shows that only feature varieties of *Cattleya purpurata*, which are held in great esteem. There are several varieties you might want to collect. One smells like licorice and has a lip the color of meat, and another has stripes on its lip. Some are white with a dark indigo blue lip, and the alba form is all creamy white. Finally, there is a white form suffused with lilac, petals a deeper lilac, and a rose-lilac lip with a yellow throat marked with rose. Heaven! You will have fun collecting the many beautiful varieties.

The great variability in the species is a blessing to the hybridizer. As Ernest Hetherington (1980) said, "A magnificent and variable species... its value in hybridizing is perhaps as great or greater than any other species..." This orchid also has many fabulous hybrids, which are now classics. Some of the early notable primary hybrids with *Cattleya purpurata* are *C. Pacavia* (a cross with *C. tenebrosa*), *C. Aphrodite* (a cross made in 1894 with *C. mendelii*), *C. Fascinator* (a cross made with *C. schroderae*), and *C. Wellsiana* (a cross made in 1894 with *C. trianae*). *Cattleya Canhamiana*, the cross with *C. mossiae*, is a famous and legendary hybrid as it is the orchid of June wedding bouquets. One of the offspring of *C. purpurata*, *Cattleya Bonanza* (Bracey) (Cavalese × Prospector), became one of the greatest parents of all time. I like *Cattleya purpurata* and its hybrids, but of course, you can pick any species that excites you.



*Cattleya Canhamiana* 'Elektra' HCC-AOS (*mossiae* × *purpurata*)

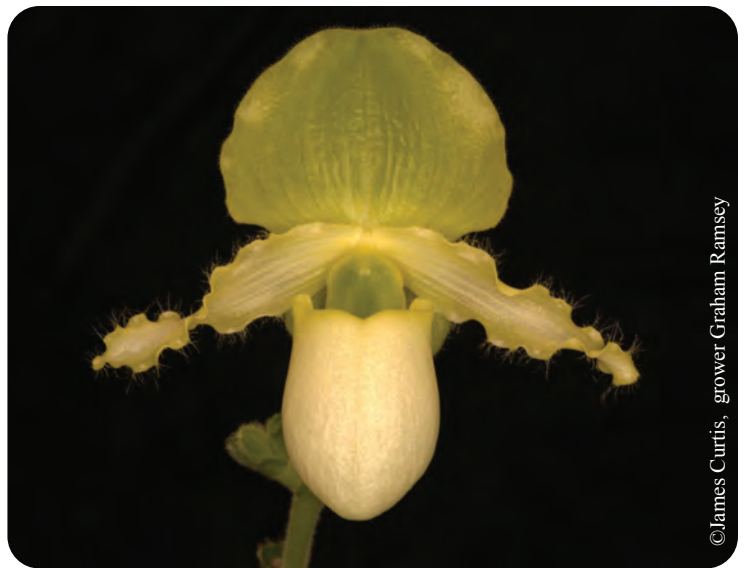


*Cattleya amethystoglossa* 'Allison' AM/AOS



*Encyclia tampense* 'Perfect Circle'

©Ron Parsons, grower Sunset Valley Orchids



*Paphopedilum* Pinocchio 'Angie' HCC-AOS  
(*glaucophyllum* × *primulinum*)

©James Curtis, grower Graham Ramsey

## A Collection that Blooms Every Day of the Year

There is no right or wrong way to collect orchids, but some ways give you the most bang for your buck. One of the most satisfying collections is one where there is something in bloom in your growing area year-round. Every year for the last twenty years, I hosted a holiday party in December as the president of my Greater Las Vegas Orchid Society. Since at least 100 people would be exploring my orchid growing area, I made sure to buy plants that would bloom in December. It was a great plan, except I had very little blooming the rest of the year. That did not work—so I started planning to acquire plants that would give me something in bloom all year round.

How do you find out what will bloom when? You can go to shows and record what blooms in the month of the show or note what blooms in your area during the show. Most importantly, if you search the internet for "orchids that bloom in May," you will find many answers. The internet will guide you to orchids that bloom each month so you can choose those to fill in the "dead spots" in your growing areas. For example, internet searches tell us that in May, many summer-blooming cattleyas are spiking or in bud, like *Cattleya amethystoglossa*, *C. bicolor*, *C. dowiana*, and many of their hybrids. Other summer-blooming cattleyas include *Cattleya guttata*, *C. intermedia*, *C. purpurata*, *C. lobata*, *C. tenebrosa*, and many of their hybrids. There are summer-blooming *Encyclia*, like *Encyclia tampense*, and *Epidendrum* and their hybrids. Many *Oncidium* alliance hybrids, including *Beallara*, *Colmanara*, and *Wilsonara*, continue to bloom. As well, *Paphiopedilum* Maudiae hybrids, sequential blooming hybrids like *Paphiopedilum Pinocchio* and most *Phragmipedium* species, including *Phrag*. Eric Young, and *Phrag*. Hanne Popow are still going strong. However, most phalaenopsis are running out of steam. You can choose one or some of the above for your June-blooming orchids.



*Phragmipedium* Hanne Popow 'Colombo' AM/AOS (*besseae* × *schlimi*)

©Nicolas Gomez, grower Colomborquideas Ltd.

## A Collection of Cattleyas that Bloom Around the Year

There are many different ways to have orchids that bloom year-round. Because I am especially fond of cattleyas, as an example, I will show you how to choose some cattleyas to bloom for you each month. Your orchids might bloom a little earlier or later, depending on where you grow, but the idea is the same.

As Greg Allikas cleverly stated, “Even if you end up steering your orchid collection in a specific direction, such as miniatures, pleurothallids, species only, or slipper orchids, building the base of a collection on year-round flowers will help maintain your enthusiasm as well as provide decoration for your house.”

Gene Crocker (2014) suggested many of these plants in his excellent article “Cattleyas Around the Year.”



©Ron Parsons, grower Randy Peterson

*Cattleya trianae*



©Eric Hunt, grower Fred Shull

*Cattleya loddigesii*



©Eric Hunt

*Rhyncholaeliacattleya Toshie Aoki 'Pokai'* (Faye Miyamoto × Waianae Flare)

In JANUARY, you might select *Cattleya trianae* from Colombia. Many have large, flared petal tips that are darker than the base color, a trait that carries through for many generations. It is responsible for the tip flares in *Rhyncholaeliacattleya Toshie Aoki*. *Cattleya Horace* has lots of *C. trianae* in the background and has been used to produce many colorful hybrids that bloom in January and February. You might also choose *Cattleya loddigesii*, a Brazilian bifoliate that blooms in January. It has several midsize flowers with a flat form that is commonly light lavender. There are also white and blue forms.



©Ron Parsons, grower Brookside Orchids

*Guarianthe aurantiaca*

In FEBRUARY, you might choose the bifoliate *Guarianthe aurantiaca*. Although the flowers are small, they are typically a gorgeous orange and bloom in clusters. Several beautiful hybrids like *Cattlianthe Jewel Box* (a cross with *C. Anza*) have been made, giving vigor to its hybrids. The Brazilian bifoliate *Cattleya amethystoglossa* also blooms in February. It has upright stems of flowers that are bright lavender with dark purple spotting.



©Eric Hunt, grower Taik Yun

*Cattlianthe Jewel Box* (*Gur. aurantiaca* × *Cattleya Anzac* (1921))



*Guarianthe skinneri* 'Casa Luna'



*Cattleya lueddemanniana* 'Arthur Chadwick'

In MARCH and APRIL, *Guarianthe skinneri*, the beloved national flower of Costa Rica, blooms. The bifoliate plants break multiple leads to readily produce specimens in time for entering in spring orchid shows. The lavender and sometimes white or pastel flowers are produced in relatively large clusters. *Cattleya mossiae*, the Easter Orchid from Venezuela, blooms in time for Easter and Mother's Day. While it is typically a light-to-medium lavender with a darker lip, it also is white with a colored lip and has white and near-blue forms. *Cattleya lueddemanniana* from Venezuela blooms in early spring on new growths. It is like *Cattleya mossiae* but with a better form.



*Cattleya mossiae* f. *semi-alba*



*Cattleya mossiae* f. *coerulea*



©Lourens Grobler

*Cattleya warneri*

In MAY, *Cattleya warneri* from Brazil blooms with large flowers in lavender, semi-alba, white, and some blue-lipped forms.



©Ron Parsons, grower Karen Olsen

*Cattleya intermedia*

In JUNE, *Cattleya purpurata* blooms in gorgeous profusion, adding to any collection. *Cattleya intermedia*, another Brazilian bifoliate, blooms in various colors with long-lasting, heavy substance.

©Ron Parsons, grower Zeon Zhou



*Cattleya warscewiczii*

In JULY, *Cattleya warscewiczii* blooms with some of the largest flowers of all cattleyas. Occasionally, the buds come up in sheaths while the growths are not mature. The plants have huge flowers, and 13 large flowers on a stem have been reported. *Cattleya gaskelliana* from Venezuela also blooms in summer and is easy to flower with attractive pastel lavender to white flowers.

©Ron Parsons, grower Marni Turkel



*Cattleya gaskelliana* f. *coerulea*



©Ron Parsons, grower California Orchids

*Cattleya guttata*



©Ron Parsons, grower Judy Carney

*Cattleya dowiana* subsp. *aurea*



©Ron Parsons, grower the late Fred Shull

*Cattleya granulosa*



*Cattleya tenebrosa*

In JULY and AUGUST, many of the bifoliate species from Brazil flower on their new growths. Some, such as *Cattleya tigrina* and *C. guttata*, have tall pseudobulbs and make large plants and large clusters of flowers. *Cattleya granulosa* makes green hybrids, and *C. bicolor* comes in bronze and green coloration. All Brazilian bifoliate need to be repotted when they are actively growing and are about to make new roots; don't repot when dormant. In August, the magnificent *Cattleya tenebrosa*, another Brazilian beauty, usually blooms with large bronze flowers and a purple lip. The bronze form gives intense color and vigor to yellow and red cattleya hybrids. Also in bloom, *Cattleya dowiana* var. *aurea* from Colombia is the most famous of the yellow species. It only lasts ten days in the summer heat. It is in the background of most of the summer-blooming yellow hybrids.



*Cattleya bicolor*



*Guarianthe bowringiana* f. *coerulea*

SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER give us *Cattleya labiata*, good for home growing. It grows in summer and blooms in fall, resting in winter. Many color forms include rich lavender, semi-alba, white, and some blue-lipped. *Guarianthe bowringiana* is a good species for beginners. Growths mature in summer, and large clusters of flowers bloom in the fall. There are also white forms. A lovely blue form is found in some cultivars of *Cattlianthe Portia*, a cross of *Guarianthe bowringiana* and *Cattleya labiata*.



*Cattleya percivaliana* 'Albert'

In NOVEMBER and DECEMBER, many large lavender hybrids bloom. These include *Cattleya labiata*, which is still blooming, and *Rhyncholaelia digbyana* and *Cattleya percivaliana*.



©Ron Parsons, grower Judy Carney

*Rossioglossum ampliatum*

For a mixed collection of not just cattleya, I went on-line and found an article from 1976 on the blooming dates of various orchid species in Florida. They suggested, for example, *Angraecum sesquipedale* in January, *Rossioglossum ampliatum* in February, phalaenopsis all spring, *Oncidium cavendishianum* in March, *Myrmecophila tibicinis* in April, *Miltonia spectabilis* in May, several *Catasetum* in June, *Cattleya warneri* in July, *Cattleya bicolor* in August, *Oncidium gardneri* in August, *Cattleya tenebrosa* in September, *Guarianthe aurantiaca* in October, several *Lycaste* in November, and *Ansellia africana* in December.



©Ron Parsons, grower Brad Cotten

*Miltonia spectabilis*



© Glen Barfield, grower Shogun Hawaii - Mathias Seelis

*Cattleya* Bow Bells ' White Sands' AM/AOS (Edithiae × Suzanne Hye)

## Devoting a Part of Your Collection to a Particular Color

Sometimes, it is fun to devote a part of your collection to a particular color, like white, red, or spotted flowers. If you are attracted to white orchids, you might decide to collect "alba" forms of your favorite orchid. Many white cattleyas have yellow, orange, purple, and sometimes light green in the throat. We call albinistic orchids with a colored lip "semi-alba" because the color inheritance for petals and sepals is separate from that of the lip. Both are uncommon in the wild but common in nursery-produced species and hybrids because breeders have selectively bred them. Perhaps you would like to collect white orchids with contrasting lips—or perhaps you want pure white orchids.

Among cattleyas, *Cattleya* Bow Bells is thought to be one of the greatest white hybrids ever produced. It is a cross between *Cattleya* Edithiae and *Cattleya* Suzanne Hye. Outstanding white hybrids from *C.* Bow Bells include *C.* Bob Betts (*C. mossiae*), *C.* Empress Bells (*C.*

Edithiae), *C.* General Patton (*C.* Barbara Billingsley), and *Rhyncholaeliocattleya* Mount Anderson (*Rlc.* Déesse). Other noteworthy white orchids are *Cattleya gaskelliana* f. *alba* and the famous hybrid *C.* Henrietta Japhet (*Eucharis* × *loddigesii*). *Cattleya mossiae* var. *wagneri* was also crucial in the development of white cattleyas. White cattleyas, variety *alba* or not, are just a delight.

You can, of course, collect many white phalaenopsis, most of which have *Phal. amabilis* in the background. They last for months and have long, arching sprays. They are inexpensive and found in many grocery and box stores.

*Dendrobium* is another genus that features many white flower forms. The flowers are used in many wedding table arrangements. Look for beautiful whites like *Dendrobium crumenatum*. Another beauty is *Dendrobium* Burana White (*Adisakdi* White × *Hirota* White).

Many *Angraecum* species are crystalline white like the Madagascan *Ang. sesquipedale*, with its 14-inch nectary. *Rhynchovola* David Sander (*Brassavola appendiculata* × *Rhyncholaelia digbyana*), *Stanhopea reichenbachiana*, *Vanda* (*Neofinetia*) *falcata*, and *Masdevallia towarensis* are other stunning white orchids.

Red, pink, and orange orchids enliven any collection. *Cymbidium* Red Imp (*Cym.* Alderman × *Cym. floribundum*) is easy to bloom and does not require a cool period. *Phalaenopsis* (formerly *Doritis*) *pulcherrima* is an intermediate beauty that does well in phalaenopsis conditions and blooms on upright spikes in summer and winter. *Sophrolaeliocattleya* Madge Fordyce (*C.* Doris (1904) × *Cattlianthe* Jewel Box) is a vigorous, compact clone. Another beautiful red is *Masdevallia* Fraseri (*Masd. coccinea* × *Masd. ignea*). This beauty loves to be cool and moist since its parents come from the Andes. There are even gorgeous red hybrids of vandas. *Vanda curvifolia* is another source of beautiful color. Be on the lookout for stunningly colored orchids—and there are many.



© Ron Parsons, grower White Oak Orchids

*Dendrobium crumenatum*

©Ron Parsons, grower Cindy Hill



*Stanhopea reichenbachiana*

©Ron Parsons, grower J & L Orchids



*Vanda falcata*



© Ron Parsons, grower Hanging Gardens

*Masdevallia towarensis*

©Ross Leach grown by Tom Etheridge and Luanne Rolly



*Masdevallia Fraseri* 'Solar Place' AM/AOS (*coccinea* × *ignea*)

Perhaps, like me, you adore spotted orchids. When my sister passed, Alice Gripp, the kind lady from Santa Barbara Orchid Estate, named a spotted cattleya for her, *Cattleya* Joyce Schun Magid (*C. Peckaviensis* × *C. schofieldiana*), because she knew spotted cattleyas were one of our favorite. Other spotted orchids you might consider are *Cattleya* Katherine Clarkson (*C. Mark Jones* × *C. Jungle Gem*), *Rhyncholaeliocattleya* Lots of Spots (*C. Katherine Clarkson* × *Rlc. Leopard Gem*), *C. Mark Jones* (*C. Penny Kuroda* (Caudebec Gp) × *C. Fascelis*), and *Rhyncholaeliocattleya* Suncoast Sunspots (*C. Jungle Elf* × *Rlc. Waianae Leopard*). Fred Clarke wrote an

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*Phalaenopsis pucherrima*

©Ron Parsons, grower California Orchids



*Cattleya guttata*

©Ron Parsons, grower Brookside Orchids



*Vanda curvifolia*



©Ron Parsons, grower Brookside Orchids

*Phalaenopsis violacea*

interesting article (2017) detailing unusual, blue-spotted bifoliate cattleyas. He also mentioned spotted forms of *Cattleya* species, such as *C. amethystoglossa*, *C. guttata*, *C. tigrina*, and *C. schilleriana*. You can also collect harlequin phalaenopsis, such as *Phal.* Lioulin Wild Cat (*Phal.* Ho's Fantastic Mirage × *Phal.* Jiuhbao Red Rose). These plants with bold and interesting spots will surely add to your pleasure.

### Fragrant Orchids

Devoting some of your collection to fragrant orchids can be very rewarding. Many orchids have a fragrance, both attractive and repulsive, but our poor sense of smell misses many of them. The orchid is advertising to its pollinator and not primarily to you. Most of the supermarket orchids are bred to be physically appealing and don't have a discernible aroma. You'll have to go to orchid nurseries or purchase them online for fragrant orchids.

Unexpectedly, several phalaenopsis have a delightful smell. Many *Phalaenopsis* fragrant hybrids are based on *Phalaenopsis violacea* from Borneo, Sumatra, and Malaya and its closely related species, *Phal. bellina* from Malaya and Sarawak in Borneo. These orchids are so sweetly scented that natives can locate them in the jungle by following their perfume trail. Although the fragrance is not always inherited from its parent, hybrids are often so fragrant that one flower can perfume a whole



©Ron Parsons, grower Judy Carney

*Phalaenopsis bellina*



©Ron Parsons, grower Brookside Orchids

*Phalaenopsis schilleriana*



*Maxillaria tenuifolia*

greenhouse. In a monograph, Eric Christenson said, “*Phalaenopsis bellina* is probably the most fragrant of all species in the genus. If I were to coin a common name for this species, it would be the ‘Fruit Loop orchid’ after the popular breakfast cereal whose fragrance it shares.”

Several other *phalaenopsis* species are also fragrant and used in hybridizing. *Phalaenopsis lueddemanniana*, known for its waxy cream and dark pink barred flowers, is fragrant on warm mornings. *Phalaenopsis schilleriana* from Luzon and other islands near the Philippines has a delicate perfume, much like roses. Both these species can give their delightful fragrances to their offspring.

The Canadian Orchid Congress published a valuable 97-page PDF that lists many delightfully fragrant orchids. Here is a chart of the orchid and its fragrance.

Orchid	Fragrance
<i>Cattleya walkeriana</i>	Soft rose with a touch of cinnamon
<i>Cynoches Wine Delight</i>	Spice, mint, pepper, and a dash of sugar
<i>Cymbidium Golden Elf</i>	Lemony, citrus
<i>Dendrobium kingianum</i>	Clover, honey, or baby powder
<i>Encyclia cordigera</i>	Chocolate, honey, and vanilla
<i>Maxillaria tenuifolia</i>	Coconut, Pina Colada
<i>Miltoniopsis Herr Alexander</i>	Soft honey, gardenia
<i>Miltoniopsis roezlii</i>	Rose petals, French perfume
<i>Oncidium sotoanum</i>	Wine, baby powder, cinnamon
<i>Oncidium Sharry Baby</i>	Chocolate
<i>Oncidium Twinkle Fantasy</i>	Spicy vanilla and sugar
<i>Phalaenopsis violacea</i>	Rosy floral, hint of cinnamon
<i>Phragmipedium schlimii</i>	Raspberry and strawberry
<i>Rhynchostylis gigantea</i>	Spicy citrus
<i>Vanda (Neofinetia) falcata</i>	Jasmine, vanilla



©Ron Parsons, grower Zeon Zhou

*Phragmipedium schlimii*

People visiting your growing area will often instinctively stick their noses in your orchids. It is so rewarding to have them delighted by the luscious smell of some in your collection. Try to add some delightful fragrant orchids to your collection, and you will surely be pleased.

### Make the Most of Your Space by Collecting Miniature Orchids

You could grow two dozen miniature or dwarf orchids in the space of one *Cattleya purpurata*. These little gems have very interesting flowers that can best be appreciated with a hand lens. Miniature orchids mean different things to different people. The bible is “Miniature Orchids,” written by Ron Parsons and Mary Gerritsen. They define miniature orchids as being a maximum of six inches (15 cm) tall and dwarf orchids as being no more than eight inches (20 cm) tall. These space-saving plants often deliver plenty of blooms on a compact plant.

There are endless species with little orchids, but the genus *Dendrobium* has several highly desirable small species, many with awesome colors and longevity. *Dendrobium masarangense* has exquisite ice-green flowers with a deep green lip. *Dendrobium aggregatum* is four to eight inches (10 to 20 cm) high and widespread across southeast Asia. It



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*Dendrobium masarangense*



©Ron Parsons, grower Ron Parsons

*Dendrobium linguiformis*

has many full two-inch (5 cm) flowers on a small plant with interesting corrugated pseudobulbs. *Dendrobium linguiforme* is covered with wispy, white flowers. It is found in Australia and New Caledonia. It has unusually thick, ribbed leaves that quickly cover its mount. The fat pseudobulbs of *Den. senile* are covered with hairy leaf sheaths and yellowish flowers.

Many genera have dwarf or smallish species. You might like to collect jewel orchids cherished for their colorful and interesting foliage, like *Haemaria* (formerly *Ludisia*) *discolor*, which has dark leaves veined with gold. Its 12-inch (32 cm) spikes of small, white flowers contrast with its bronze-green foliage. *Vanda* (formerly *Neofinetia*) *falcata*, a Japanese specialty, produces dwarf growths, producing masses of stunning white flowers with a delicate vanilla and chocolate fragrance in the late summer and fall. Finally, in a field too numerous to mention all, there are a number of diminutive *Angraecum* species sure to delight. The small, compact *Angraecum distichum* has special overlapping leaves that give its mass of tangled growth a braided appearance. *Angraecum leonis* has lovely white, two-inch (five cm) flowers borne on plants with flattened curved leaves of unusual appearance.

The Pleurothallidinae have dozens of little, attention-worthy orchids. Once you start, you will want all of them.



©Ron Parsons, grower Brad Cotten

*Angraecum distichum*



*Restrepia cuprea*

©Ron Parsons, grower Mami Turkel



*Restrepia flosculata*

©Ron Parsons, grower John Leathers



*Restrepia lansbergii*

©Ron Parsons, grower Ron Parsons

The Pleurothallidinae are the most logical choice for small areas. *Stelis* has an enormous number of species, including the hairy, bowl-shaped blossoms of *Stelis amparoana*. *Porroglossum* have trigger lips to capture insects, and some smaller *Dracula* species, like *Dracula bella*, have fearsome flowers borne on stems that grow straight down. Some of the smaller Pleurothallidinae species are very attractive, like *Pabstiella mirabilis*, which has white, popcorn-shaped flowers. Consider *Restrepia*, as well as many *Restrepia* have brilliant colors. As Rebecca Northern said in 1980, “*Restrepia* embodies the good qualities of orchids. It is a compact, attractive plant and flowers over and over from the same growth. It flowers year-round and is more heat tolerant than most pleurothallids.”

There are also some lovely smaller-growing *Catasetum* with pseudobulbs no more than six inches (15 cm) tall. *Catasetum denticulatum* is a particularly successful parent of mini-*Catasetum*. It blooms with attractive, densely flowered inflorescences of cream-colored flowers with slightly round, cupped segments and boldly spotted with maroon. The hybrids are easy growers with beautifully colored flowers and can flower several times a year. *Catasetum* Karen Armstrong (*Ctsm.* Susan Fuchs × *Ctsm.* *denticulatum*) is a hybrid with *Ctsm.* *pileatum* and *Ctsm.* *Expansum* in the background resulting in bigger flower size and better color.



©Ron Parsons, grower Sunset Valley Orchids

*Catasetum denticulatum* 'SVO II' AM/AOS

Try to make a place for small beauties like these. Remember, however, that they need to be watered more often than big plants, so you must consider this when adding this to your collection.

### Collect Orchids from a Country Special to You

Perhaps your ancestors or someone special to you is from Africa, or you became fascinated with the flora of that country during a visit. You can dedicate a portion of your collection to these special orchids or orchids from any country with a special meaning for you. The best-known African genera are *Angraecum* and *Aerangis*, members of which grow on both mainland and Madagascar. Three-quarters of the approximately 200 species of *Angraecum* come from Madagascar, and these are the most spectacular and commonly grown species. *Jumella* is another mainly Madagascan genus. *Aerangis* and *Rangaeris*, both desirable genera, contend with a dry, cool season and benefit from being kept fairly dry in the winter. All *Aerangis* species are lovely, but none more than *Aerangis luteoalba* var. *rhodosticta* and *Aerangis distincta*. Many genera related to *Angraecum*, like *Diaphananthe* and *Tridactyle*, like *Tridactyle bicaudate*, are worth collecting when you can find them. Another



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*Aerangis distincta*

genus is *Cyrtorchis* with species with waxy, ivory-white flowers turning apricot as they age. Finally, the genus *Ansellia* has one of my favorite species, easy to grow and flower, is *Ansellia africana*, the Leopard Orchid, which occurs throughout tropical and South Africa. The flowers are yellow mottled with deep maroon-brown. Its cane-like pseudobulbs, which can reach 20 inches (51 cm), have up to ten leaves on the upper half and a much-branched, showy terminal inflorescence.

When the day arrives when you are out of room, time, or money, you have come to a crossroads in the orchid-growing hobby and must stop and plan. When



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*Tridactyle bicaudata*

you must decide to specialize in a few areas, remember that it can be the beginning of an exciting adventure, adding to your pleasure and interest in your beloved orchids. It is a sign that you have graduated from an amateur orchid collector and arrived at a more thoughtful stage in your orchid journey. ✿

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