

ORCHIDS WE SHOULD ALL GROW GRAMMATOPHYLLUM scriptum

If you are ready to take a big step in adding to your collection, this may be the plant for you. Perhaps this isn't a plant we should all grow, because we all don't have 100 or so square feet of space for a single plant. This species holds the record for being the largest orchid in the world. Specimen plants have been recorded weighing over one ton and having more than 4000 blooming flowers, 50 or more per spike on inflorescences of 10 feet long. A mature specimen can reach 3 to 7' tall with a spread of 12 to 20'. Alas, though spectacular, it's not really the plant for the windowsill grower.

The genus *Grammatophyllum* hails from the South Pacific islands and surrounding areas. It lives near sea level where it is hot and hotter. Did I mention humid as well? Typically 85-90 degrees and 90% humidity year around.

There are about a dozen species in the genus with two distinct growth patterns.

One group has long canes with alternating leaves giving it the appearance of a palm frond. Canes can be up to ten feet long. The other growth pattern is a thick somewhat stocky pseudobulb with a cluster of several leaves emerging from the top.

Both types put out long pendulous inflorescence with up to 50 flowers, 3-4" across.

Gram. scriptum is found from New Guinea to Indonesia, growing near the coast. It can grow in nearly full sun light if properly acclimated. It blooms during the summer months in the northern hemisphere, typically, June and July. Flowers are yellow with brown markings although alba types such as the one shown above are common though slightly smaller in stature and flower size.

This plant is a rapid grower that can almost double in size each year. It is normally propagated by division. A caution when dividing. The division will likely not bloom the first year as the plant takes time to stabilize and put down root growth.

I try to keep the plants in a clay pot, no more than 8-10" before splitting them. Otherwise, they get too large for my growing space and too hard to handle.



When the plant is in active growth, fertilize heavily and keep constantly wet and humid. If this sounds like a recipe for fungal and bacterial problems, you are correct. Two constants are required to minimize water borne pathogens. First, I use a systemic fungicide several times each growing season. Start in early spring and apply about once every six weeks. Second, air movement is a must. Don't put this plant in a corner where air will swirl, but not reach it. Keep it in the open and blow air across it with a fan if necessary. If you do use a fan, remember that will drop the humidity, so extra misting or spray will be necessary.

You will also need to protect this species from cold temperatures. It does not like temperatures below 60 degrees. At 50, I move it close to the house where the structure adds warmth and the pool water temperature gives me a couple degrees and some added humidity. If it gets really cold, I move it inside to the garage.

Grow the plant in a pot or basket with room for several years of growth. I grow it in large bark, charcoal and perlite. Every several years, I split the plant in early spring just as new roots are emerging. In two or three years, you will have several plants. Several years later, you will have many plants and you can gift your Society's raffle table with magnificent specimens.