

# An Orchid by any other Name

You will have more fun with orchids when you know some basic names.

The reason is practical: your success as a grower will be helped a lot by knowing some basic names. Locating information on your plants can depend on correctly recognizing its type. There is a lot of information out there: online is expanding resources exponentially. Getting to what you need without wading through reams of technical and specialist information will be helped along by knowing the type of orchid you have

Knowing some names can bring you personal satisfaction: being able to communicate about your orchids can lead to greater knowledge and, thus, greater satisfaction. Part of the fun of orchids is talking to other growers about mutual experiences and learning from the errors of others. Vendors will like knowing what type you are interested in because they can guide you to better choices for your collection. Orchid judges know a lot of species by their scientific names, but for most hybrids, they just refer to their type (until they get the detailed information they need to make a judgment). In other words, the type of an orchid goes a long way in communicating. Go to a local society and ask about or comment on an orchid type by name and you will get the ball rolling on a real conversation.

Learning names can be daunting: the scientific naming system is complex and, to everyone's chagrin, changing. This is one of the most intimidating aspects about orchids. There are a lot of names because there are a lot of orchids. There are more orchid species than any flowering plant except the daisy family. And the number of hybrids from these species is remarkably large.

First of all, learn the name of any orchid you own. You need this to be sure you are providing the right growing conditions for the plant. Secondly, learn to recognize major types of orchids. I will list the five I think will be most useful to know.



## ***Cattleya***

Cattleyas were at one time the standard by which all orchids were judged. Remarkable in size, richly colored, with lips large and redolent with markings, these were the choice for corsages. Now, with careful breeding, size has been cut down and the number of flowers increased.

## ***Dendrobium***

Dendrobiums come in an amazing array of sizes, colors, and growing conditions. There are about 1500 species, mainly from tropical Asia and Australia. The common ones have relatively tall canes and take abundant light. They produce lovely sprays of flowers. The most easily available ones that are sold in big-box stores are hybrids of what are called phalaenopsis "types" because they vaguely resemble phalaenopsis.



## ***Oncidium***

Oncidiums, often called Dancing Ladies, are extremely popular because they lend themselves to indoor culture. The best



hybrids produce colorful sprays which are fragrant. From the New World, native to Mexico, the Caribbean, South America, and Florida!

### *Phalaenopsis*

Phalaenopsis orchids have become the standard for orchids because they have become so widely available and inexpensive. Their classic presentation, in long, arching sprays with one flower just touching the next, is seen in luxury settings (in magazine, hotel lobbies, etc.) The white ones are very popular in weddings. As pot-plants, they are sold in all sorts of places, from grocery stores to high-end florist shops. They do very well in home conditions.



### *Paphiopedilum*

Paphiopedilums are the most easily recognized because of their characteristic pouch. There are closely related orchids with pouches, some of which are native to North America. The ones available commonly for sale are paphiopedilums, however. Spotted, warted, hairy, shiny, or striped, they are all intriguing and extremely popular as house plants, particularly in Europe but also in North America.

Many of the scientific names of orchids are real tongue-twisters. Fortunately, the five main types are not so difficult and you should learn to say them. Do not be over-concerned with absolutely correct pronunciation. First of all, in the English-speaking world there are differences in pronunciation. More importantly, if you just get the beginning approximately right, orchidists will know what you mean. The following will help get you started:

Cattleya — CAT-lee-ah

Dendrobium — den-DRO-bee-um

Oncidium — on-SID-dee-um

Paphiopedilum — paff-ee-oh-PED-ih-lum

Phalaenopsis — fail-eh-NOP-sis

Depending on your location, you may want to be sure you know the local popular orchids. For example, if you live in Florida you will want to recognize and know *Vanda* (VAN-duh). If you live in California you may want to recognize and know *Cymbidium* (sim-BID-ee-um). As your experience grows, you will naturally learn others.

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