

Growing Australian Orchids on Bribie Island

Most of our native epiphytic orchids can be grown on Bribie out in the garden for best results but if you wish to show them you will need to pot them or attach to slabs of hardwood or cork. They can be hung from trees or placed on the ground in their pots but make sure that the sun is not able to hit the sides of pots and burn the roots, easiest done of course if you bunch them together as the nurseries do.

The following native orchids are easily grown, reliable flowerers and showy.



Phaius tankervilleae

Two big terrestrial - live in ground - natives *Calanthe triplicata* and *Phaius tankervilleae* which are closely related, naturally live in subtropical rainforest, have large pleated leaves which may die down a bit in winter.

Calanthe triplicata or Christmas Orchid has beautiful rounded clusters of pure white blooms, a bit like heavy lace, on long stems held way above its leaves; and flowers, guess when - Christmas! It is a heavy feeder and drinker, needs high humidity and shadehouse conditions - so pop it on the floor!

There are four species of the *Phaius* family which are native to Queensland. The most commonly cultivated being *Phaius tankervilleae* (after Lady Emma Tancarville wife of one of Captain Cook's wild boys). Flower spikes are held erect about a metre high and totally unlike the *Calanthe*, each flower is large, rather flat with a trumpet-like lip (or labellum); up to 10 per spike. It can be grown in more open ground, loves early morning sun and do very well on Bribie as they do on Fraser Island, in sandy peat or other well drained soil. I've seen them grown very successfully on mounded soil at Godwin Beach. They can also be easily grown in pots in the shadehouse.

Spathoglottis family has 45 species, two of which are Queensland species. The most popular more robust and with larger flowers is *Spathoglottis plicata*. These can be grown as garden flowers in well drained soil - water at dry times and feed when you feel like it! They have bright showy purple/mauve flowers and will throw out flowers for months from Spring. Their leaves are pleated too but are only 30cm. They're inclined to die down in Winter - DO NOT fertilize then.

Amongst our native epiphytes (growing on trees) or lithophytes (growing on or in between rocks or on cliffs) the hardiest would have to come from the *Dendrobium* family. Most people are familiar with the Rock Lily or *Dendrobium speciosum* with its large thick stiff leaves and huge flowering spikes of white to dark yellow blooms which grow naturally on rocky outcrops in or near rainforest and in Queensland. On rainforest trees they can grow enormous weighing around a tonne and accompanied by ferns, staghorns, vines, etc. and can topple a rainforest giant particularly with heavy rain and/or high wind. *Dendrobium speciosum* adapts well to pot culture or grow it au naturale in your garden, on rocks if you have them, they need good drainage or plant in raised bed. Any well drained compost will do, particularly if it contains charcoal and leaf mould. It does need good air movement and early morning sun.

Dendrobium kingianum or Pink Rock Orchid can be grown in pots and they make excellent rockery plants giving little pink, mauve, or white sprays in Spring. They require excellent drainage, occasional feeding but aren't fussy about frequency of watering once established. If they do dry out and the pseudobulbs shrink and wither, give them plenty of water with a minute amount of liquid fertilizer immediately, then water and fertilize as normal a few days later.

A naturally occurring hybrid between *Den. speciosum* and *Den. kingianum* - called *Den. delicatum* is another favourite. As you'd expect it is somewhat intermediate between its parents in growth very free flowering and soon becomes a specimen plant in a pot. We use medium bark in pots and in raised beds amongst rocks in the garden. It is covered in fragrant pink, white or creamy flowers in spring.



Everyone knows the Cooktown Orchid or *Dendrobium bigibbum* (pictured). Grow them in small pots - the more root bound, the more flowers - well worth remembering - and keep drier, do not fertilize in Winter. Alternatively grow them directly on rough barked trees (avoid *Melaleucas* or paperbarks as orchid roots can reach the "tea-tree oil" under the bark and this is fatal for your orchid). They require a sleep or 'rest' in winter without extra watering; as soon as they start to show new growth in spring start watering and fertilizing until early/mid summer. In Autumn you will be rewarded with masses of the famous flowers often on semi pendulant spikes which last up to five months.

Den discolor or Golden Orchid - this is the mother of all Aussie toughies. It can grow up to five metres, out in full sun, and can cope even with salt spray. It loves to sit on rocks basking in sunshine and if it is lucky enough to find a tree or other support, it can shoot upward for years. Exposed leaves become yellowed and unsightly but remember - no sun, no flowers. It needs a bit of a rest in winter with no extra watering unless its pseudobulbs start to shrink. It flowers late winter/early spring when it starts to need water. Flowers last 7-8 weeks. We fertilize ours heavily from October until Easter. Blooms range from dark brown to light yellow, a popular natural variety is called *Den. broomfieldii* (after the original collector, a Capt. Broomfield) which is yellow.

Dendrobium jonesii or Oak Orchid is delightful and easy to grow, one of our favourites, it is just like a miniature *Den speciosum* with fluffy cream flowers, it is reliable and needs no looking after once established. Grow it in a tree fork at eye level or a little lower or in a pot but keep it outside - our experience has been when in orchid house - no flowers, outside - always flowers. Strongly fragrant in the mornings it needs good light, humidity and good ventilation.

Dendrobium monophyllum or Lily of the Valley Orchid has showy flowers similar to Lily of the Valley with yellow bells hanging from an arched spike. A small orchid but becomes a focal point in the garden after a few years; attach to any rough barked tree (other than *Melaleuca*) or slab, it needs bright light, humidity and occasional fertilizer. It's a creeping type so don't bother about potting it up. We grow them low down, about 30cm from the ground as they mostly grow upwards and it keeps them more humid. Loves morning sun but afternoon sun is too harsh.

Cymbidiums - *Cymbidium canaliculatum* or Channel-leaf Cymbidium/Black Orchid pseudobulbs are approx. 12cms with long stiff grey channelled leaves. They are extremely hardy, not keen on fertilizers so if you must, - use 1/8 or less strength recommended on the label. The spikes are long, with about 60 starry flowers from greeny, brown, purple, dull red, dark reddish black, in various combinations, often blotched. The best chance of survival is to secure a small plant and pot it or place it on a tree where you intend to keep it as they resent root disturbance. A lovely variety is var. *sparksii*, very dark and showy. Place above eye level as the spikes are usually pendulous and it gives the best view.

Vanda hindsii is officially our only native *Vanda* and is found in Far North Queensland and Papua New Guinea. It's a large orchid found in tropical forest canopies. It is usually noticed from the thick whitish roots hanging down for meters. It has shiny brown flowers with white petioles and has 6-8 blooms per spike. It can be grown here but is unlikely to get as big as in the wild. It requires copious water in the warmer months and as much liquid fertilizer as you can afford. It needs good ventilation and extremely good drainage, so keep it in a pot hanging outside or directly in the fork of a tree. Flowers are showy and last 3-4 months.

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These notes have been used at our New Grower's Meetings. They are from various sources and we thank the authors. All articles are supplied in good faith and the Bribie Island Orchid Society and its members will not be held responsible for any loss or damage.