

Orchid History



The first written reference to orchids was in 551 B.C. by Confucius in China where he noted their fragrance. The Chinese also wrote the first book on the cultivation of orchids in A.D. 1000 and in the 1700's the Chinese wrote "a flower without fragrance is like a woman without virtue."

Blc Goldenzelle 'Lemon Chiffon'

Western civilization made the first reference to orchids in about 350 B.C. It was made by the Greek philosopher, Theophrastus, who wrote about the orchids' medicinal value. Theophrastus named the plants orchis the Greek word for testicle as the tubers on a local terrestrial orchid looked like testicles.

The first written reference to the exotic species from the Americas was in the 1500's where the Vanilla orchid was illustrated. The vanilla orchid was used by the Aztecs. In the second half of the 17th century the tropical orchids of Asia were discovered after the formation of the Dutch East India Company. One collector said that he collected 17000 specimens of one genus and another said that he collected as many plants of one species that he could find and destroyed the rest to preserve its rarity.

From the beginning of the 19th century, tropical orchid collecting increased but only by the rich. It was not until 1856 that the first flowering hybrid orchid was displayed by John Dominy. This orchid mule as some orchidists called it was a cross between *Cattleya furtata* and *Calanthe masuca*. It was called Cal. Dominyi.

In 1901 The House of Sander in England published an orchid guide and at the end a small hybrid list. Fred Sander made it his life work to correctly list all hybrids so that in 1946 the first edition of "Sanders List of Orchid Hybrids" was published. In 1961 the Royal Horticultural Society took over this mammoth task and have been doing it ever since.

That is why the orchid family is the only plant in the plant kingdom to have a complete record going back to that very first hybrid. That is also why it is so important to correctly name, spell and clearly print our labels.

What goes on the label?

It tells you the orchid genus – whether it is a species or hybrid – if it is a natural cross – its grex and special name – if the cross is self or sibling – if it has any awards and if it is a mericlone (M/C).

Labels need to be easily seen and easily read both for your own benefit and the benefit of others.

When benching a plant face the inflorescence for the best viewing then make sure the label is placed where it can be seen clearly. (and the pot number). It is too easy to take a label from a pot – read it –then put it back in the wrong pot.

Have your own catalogue and numbering system for your own information about each orchid.

On the label we have the orchid name and on the back we have its catalogue number and the date when it was last potted.

Place a small tag (a bread bag tag is fine) in the bottom of the pot with the catalogue number on it as an insurance against lost labels.

Species	<i>C. skinneri</i> Var. <i>alba</i>
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C. is for Cattleya the genus. skinneri is the species and alba is a variety of that species. Only species have varieties. No capital letters for species. Species may be written in italics or underlined.

Hybrid	<i>B/c.</i> Sylvia Fry 'Wallacia' FCC/AOC, AM/AOC.
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Sylvia Fry is the hybrid name or grex and 'Wallacia' (note the one inverted comma) is the special name for a special clone. The plant was awarded a First Class Certificate and an Award of Merit by the Australian Orchid Council.

References :

"What's in a Name" by Brian Maxwell *Australian Orchid Review*, June '89

"Orchid Names" by R W Nicolle *Australian Orchid Review*, autumn '88

"Orchids" by Peter McKenzie Black

These notes have been used at our Cultural and 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.