



Woolf Orchid Culture

THOSE MAGNIFICENT COLOMBIAN MILTONIAS

by John Woolf

There are two types of Miltonias, the Brazilian (warmer growing) and the Colombian (cool growing), the Colombian Miltonias have now been removed by some Botanist's and placed in the new Genus Miltoniopsis. How long they stay there will depend on the next Botanist to look at this group who may give it a new name or the old one back, when a Hybridizer wishes to name a cross he has made and flowered, he has to use the genus Miltonia and they will always be known to hobbyist's as Miltonias.

My first dab at growing the Colombian Miltonias was way back in 1975 when I purchased a plant of Milt. Hamburg 'Bambi' and this plant is still alive today, this says heaps for the staying power of Milts. There are some 5 species in this section of Miltonias :-

Milt. roezlii (Rchb.f.) from Colombia

Milt. phalaenopsis (Linden & Rchb.f.) from Colombia

Milt. santanii (Rchb.f.) from Colombia

Milt. vexillaria from Colombia {has some 20 varieties Sanders 1927}

Milt. warscewiczii (Rchb.f.) from Costa Rica, Colombia. [there is also another Milt. warscewiczii (Rchb.f.) that is totally different to this species, pictured in Bechtel, Cribb & Lacnert's Manuel of Cultivated Orchid Species 1981)

The first (as far as i can ascertain) registered hybrid was Milt. Bleuana (vexillaria x roezlii) 1889 and then there seemed to be a lull in hybridizing until the era from 1920 to the mid 1930's. During this period there were many new hybrids registered and some from that period still hold their heads up amongst today's finest :- Milt. Amanda 1933, Milt. Limelight 1933, Milt. Lyceana 1925, Milt. Mrs. J B Crum 1931 and Milt. Petunia 1931.

Again there appears to be a period till the mid 1950's when the following popular Grex's were registered Milt. Alderwood 1857, Milt. Alexander Dumas 1957, Milt. Cindy Kane 1968, Milt. Dearest 1966, Milt. Delores Hoyt 1960, Milt. Emotion 1945, Milt. Pam Pam 1964, Milt. Hamburg 1965 and Milt. Woodlands 1949, and so the trend to produce new and brighter colours, larger blooms and easier more robust growing plants continued with many new registrations that continue today. Here are some of my recommendations :- Milt. Anjou 'Red Mask' 1957, Milt. Alger 'Paris' 1957, Milt. Melissa Baker 'Independance Day' 1875, Milt. Bert Field 'Crimson Glow' 1965, Milt. Gordon Hoyt 'Delores' 1977, Milt. Grin 'Pink Frill' 1967, Milt. Hudson Bay 'Lisa's Rose' 1976, Milt. Leo Holguin 'Robust' 1980, Milt. Beall's Strawberry Joy '325' 1987, Milt. Firewater 'Butterfly' 1988, Milt. Jersey 'Sweet Candy' 1989, Milt. Zorro 'Yellow Delight' 1989 and Milt. Ivory Belle 1995. This is but the "tip of the iceberg " as there are many fine clones available today, and although we do not see many seedlings for sale, there aren't a lot of "duds" in Colombian Miltonias. However there are many more mericlones available today than seedlings and this accounts for the quality we are seeing on the showbench, the range of colours is expanding with quality yellows being added over the last few years.

CULTURE

We find these orchids to be relatively easy to grow, they tolerate a much wider temperature variation than first thought and the flowers can last up to 3 months in good condition under the right cultural practices. I have listed the cultural conditions in order of importance to the success of growing and flowering this magnificent genus.

(1) Humidity - watering, We find these plants need to be surrounded by moist air all year round. Compost must retain some moisture but allow good air movement through. When watering 'flood' plants to remove the stale air, and replenishing it with fresh oxygenated air, water quality is of utmost importance for these

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high altitude plants.

(2) Compost (growing media), Repotting every two years must be done at the right time, when new roots are being produced and before they get too long as you have more chance of damaging them. Plants should be grown in as small a pot as possible, with a well grown plant in a 100mm pot producing 50 plus blooms. We use a 5-10 mm composted bark.

(3) Air Movement, this is a must as if kept moist in a stale air situation you will have fungal/bacterial problems. It is better to prevent problems of this type than to try to control them once they have taken hold.

(4) Light, Temperature, These plants are shade lovers, plants should be grown so the leaves are strongly upright (see fertilizer). We find they will tolerate temperature from a low of 5 c to highs of 35 c with no detrimental effects as long as commonsense prevails. In hot weather over 30 c water plants late evening and keep the atmosphere around the plants high. It is normal for the plants to get a greyish look about them in hot weather. If your temperature goes over 35 c for lengthy periods (more than three days at a time) your plants will suffer.

Flowers - These are produced from November to February in Toowoomba, however plants may flower at any time of the year you will find blooms produced during the cooler periods will have better size, colour and substance. So if you are dedicated to winning shows you may have to take a look at an artificially controlled environment. Flower colour can change dramatically depending on the weather and fertilizing regime.

If the raceme opens today in 30 c plus , the colour etc will not be as good as a raceme that opens 2 - 3 days later in 22 c conditions. Flowers last well on the plants, alas, not well when cut.

Fertilizer - It is important to keep the leaves of the plants firm, too much nitrogen in shady conditions make for soft plants, easy victims for fungi/bacterial attacks and easy prey for pests. We have found chelated low nitrogen mixtures to be the best. A little extra nitrogen to get the plants away after winter (in late August) is beneficial.

Pests - Being a softer leaved orchid (as distinct from a hard leaved Cattleya) most pests will enjoy munching on the leaves and the luscious big soft blooms, prevention is better than cure, so use low toxic preventative measures to keep plants and growing area free of pests.

Disease - if your conditions are correct with good boyant air movement your disease problems should be minimal,if you continually suffer problems look at your growing area, compost, water quality, fertilizing program etc.

These are truly a beautiful orchid and, as many orchid lovers are finding, not that difficult to grow. There are plenty of these "pansy " orchids available, we currently have same 30 plus mericlones at different stages from flask to flowering.

So go grow a Miltonia (opsis).