

PAPHIOPEDILUMS - SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

by Wayne Bourdette

The ladyslippers as they are commonly called are a group of terrestrial orchids consisting of four basic genera. *Cypripediums* although originally lumped together to include North American, European and Asian species, are now correctly linked to only the plants found in the forests of North America, North Asia, and Europe. The Southern Asian genus is *Paphiopedilum*. The two South American genera are *Phragmipediums* and the seldom seen genus *Selenipedium*.

Flowers in this group are usually very distinctive with the lip and dorsal sepal in many cases being the most prominent features. There are *Phragmipediums*, however, like *P. caudatum* that produce incredibly long petals that will actually continue to grow until they touch the ground, which some experts think may allow pollinators access to the flowers. The petals can be slender, carried laterally, and add a sense of grace and elegance to the flowers or they can be more rigid and boldly marked as in *Paph. sukhalii* to give a more dramatic effect. Lips or pouches as they are called by most orchid growers, for the most part have the appearance of a "slipper" and are usually different shades of green and browns to almost black in some of the most modern hybrids. In the more recent years with the discovery of the Chinese *Paphiopedilums*, some incredible new colored flowers have emerged. *Paphiopedilum armeniacum* produces the most breathtaking golden yellow flowers, *Paph. malipoense* adds flowers of a large size in the apple green tones, and *Paph. micranthum* adds rose tones, greens and yellow tints in addition to its almost out of proportion large lip. There are many more to appeal to almost anyones tastes whether they be for the bizarre or the incredibly dramatic.

Another interesting aspect to consider about these plants is the number of flowers that they can carry per inflorescence. Species like *Paph. bellatulum* will produce a single very round flower that is white with bold burgundy spotting. *Paph. lowii* can yield three to six flowers on a gracefully arching inflorescence and on specimens can easily have over **one hundred flowers.**

There are a myriad of possible options whether you enjoy species and or hybrids, have only a small space for plants or have a greenhouse. You can imagine the possibilities when it comes to hybridizing, growers are able to choose the most desirable characteristics, such as color, size, floriferousness, ease of cultivation, and breed to achieve these goals producing plants to satisfy anyone.

All the members of this tribe lack pseudobulbs and are not capable of storing water. There is generally a short stem or rhizome connecting the growths or fans of leaves, as they are commonly called. The flowers will develop from the center of this fan and the buds can often be seen quite early in their development.

One of the real positives of this group is that these plants can be grown in a variety of places. You definitely do not need a greenhouse to do wonders with these marvelous orchids. A recent

Award of Merit from the AOS of 83 points was granted to a windowsill grown plant of Paph. godefroyae in this region (grower Barbara Wildfeir, Matinecock Orchid Society) to illustrate this point. Windowsills, wardian cases, under fluorescent and incandescent lights in basements or garages, sun rooms, and heaven knows where else, are suitable places to cultivate this group.

The key issues in cultivation are that the plants do not totally dry out, but that they have good drainage at the roots, have temperatures between 58 and 65 degrees F at night and receive filtered direct sunlight or artificial light to sustain good growth and encourage flowering. Choose a media that will hold some moisture but will be coarse enough to allow some air to get to the root system. Find a location to allow some temperature drop to the suggested night temperatures above. Finally, provide enough sunlight to have a good light green leaf color, but not dark green that looks lush and produces foliage and no flowers.

This has been a brief glimpse into the strange, bizarre, breathtaking, and majestic world of the lady slipper. Every collection should find room for these interesting and fascinating orchids. The best part is that anyone can be successful in growing them.

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