

\*\*\*\*\*

### Orchid Plants to Consider for South Texas Culture

#### *Maxillariella tenuifolia*

Reaching back several years, your editor's old pre-computer penciled records

cite an orchid plant numbered Pl#200675-1. In that epoch it was known as *Maxillaria tenuifolia*. It was redefined in 2007 as *Maxillariella tenuifolia* as this species was known from Mexico through Central America, but differed from one in South American countries. This plant came to your editor as a simple strip of a rhizome about 14-15 cm long. The parent plant had been



Fig. 1 Pl#160605-5. *Maxillariella tenuifolia*. Digital photo DSC\_4015 Thur-07Apr-11.

mounted on a cedar plank by its owner Peter De Bella, of Long Island, New York. As it had been already grown that way, the small plant division was similarly mounted on a piece of cedar by your editor. That was in June, 1975, and by mid-November of that same year it had flourished well enough that a similar piece was given by your editor to another orchidist on Long Island, and the plant retained by your editor measured 35 cm! Sadly, that original plant was lost in the greenhouse holocaust of several years later, but another plant of the same species was given to your editor by Mrs. Betty Dunton then of South Pasadena, California, while your editor was there on a speaking engagement.

The present plant is in the records as Pl#160605-5. *Maxillariella tenuifolia*, and it was preliminarily potted on Wed-22Jun-05. Then on Thur-27Jul-06 it was transferred to a lattice basket. On Sat-12Jun-10 it was relocated into a 10-inch lattice basket and three additional divisions were potted. One went to Mrs. Odie Garza and the other two continued to be cultured locally. Locally, flowers have been photographed in early May-06, May-07, Jun-07, Apr-08, and so on to the present. Figured here (Figs. 1 & 2) was during April-11.

We jump to Mon-18Aug-14. The plant lodged in the 10-inch basket on 12Jun-10 had suffered damage in the overheated episode in early Aug-13 and still had some dead foliage. It was removed and relodged in the same basket with new bark, plant tags updated, and was hung in the big shade house. A 10-inch clay pot also potted on 12-Jun-10, made into three divisions. Each was lattice-basketed; two in

11-inch baskets and one in an 8-inch lattice basket.

This species is known to flower anytime from January into August, but its peak period is April through June. Your editor has seen it flowering in rainforests, in semi-deciduous forests, and even in an oak forest near Aquismón, Mexico. In that location there was a truly giant plant (the size of two large hay bales!) growing on a large branch high in the tree.

This species will do quite well mounted on a tree fern plaque or cork slab, but grown that way, one must be able to see that it's watered much more frequently, and fertilized a bit more. It did so well in the 10-inch clay pot that was emptied on 18 August that the contents were relodged in the three containers previously noted.

As may be seen from Fig. 2, its flowers are held solitary as a three-cornered bright red bloom that smells like coconut (some say it smells like strawberries). It's normally kept just as a pot plant or as a "hanging basket" plant; one not normally used for any corsage or other floral work although your editor recalls making up a two or three flowered corsage for a young lady of seven or eight years. It made a delightful corsage for an already pretty little girl!



Fig. 2 Pl#160605-5. *Maxillariella tenuifolia*. Digital photo DSC\_4016 Thur-07Apr-11.

In nature it prefers a temperature envelope of about the mid-50's to the mid 80's (F.), but in the greenhouse it's done well despite winter dips to near 40°F. and summer Victoria, Texas spikes to as high as 103°F! However, it's important to remember: when the temperatures are going to be very low, keep the plants fairly dry, and when the summer heat is severe, keep the humidity high and the air movement going! As far as a potting medium, it's important to keep whatever you use in a condition that permits it to be well drained. Don't let it get soggy and go sour or you will lose those wiry roots and soon you will lose the plant completely. Remember, in nature this plant grows among the tree foliage which breaks the sunlight. *M. tenuifolia* should not be exposed to the direct sun except perhaps very early in the morning. It uptakes the most water from about February through August, and its ideal light range is between about 1500 to 2000 foot candles.

***Cattleya Pelon*** (C. Angelwalker × C. Swan Lake)

This one will probably never win any flower awards, but if one occasionally uses an orchid flower for corsage work or as a home display plant that doesn't have giant flowers, *Cattleya Pelon* has been a standout!

In late August, 1995, your editor paid the grand sum of \$15 for a plant at the sale table of the Alamo Orchid Society, San Antonio, Texas. It was carrying two flowers on an inflorescence. They were relatively small (9 cm NS), white with a little yellow in the throat, and fragrant. The plant resulted from C. Angelwalker × C. Swan Lake. As an exercise in curiosity, Pelon's ancestry was recorded and took up twenty lines to outline its ancestry!

Since 1995, C. Pelon's data has filled two typewritten computer pages. It's flowers have been used for innumerable floral arrangements, corsages, wedding bouquets, and plant divisions are still used for hospital and home loans for indigent individuals.

Plant divisions have gone through near freezing temperatures to the overheated holocaust of early August, 2013. It flowers in mid-late July through August with two to four fragrant, and long lasting flowers per inflorescence. Plant divisions have done well in lattice baskets, clay pots, plastic pots; in fir bark, and in bark with a bit of *Sphagnum* added near new shoots so moisture is retained a little as new roots emerge. If not stripped away by an orchidist, the mature vegetative growths are clad with a coat that gradually becomes a loose white scariosus sheathing. If the plant becomes scale-infested, this sheathing can conceal the shell-like insects, but in clean cultural conditions, this sheathing can retain a little of the sprayed fertilizer, only to release it to the plant a little more slowly as the plant is subsequently watered.

One can pay more for a giant-sized white *Cattleya* hybrid, or look to grow something smaller (e.g. C. Louise Georgianna or C. Henrietta Japhet), but considering a plant that isn't high priced; flowers in mid-summer, is floriferous, fragrant, and easy to grow, *Cattleya Pelon* has fit well in your editor's collection.



Fig. 3. Pl#250895-2. *Cattleya Pelon*, part inflorescence  
DSC\_6227 Sat-16Aug-14.

***Phalaenopsis* [Phal.] pulcherrima** (syn. *Doritis pulcherrima*)

When one thinks about the genus *Phalaenopsis*, what usually comes to mind are large white or pink flowers on an arching display atop a cluster of large (at times



Figs. 4, 5, & 6. *Phalaenopsis* (ex *Doritis*) *pulcherrima*.  
Fig. 4. Pl#140606-32. Purple fma. Fig. 5. Pl#180908-1. White fma. Fig. 6. Pl#280708-36. Blue fma.  
DSC\_2963; Mon-20Jul-09 DSC\_2964; Mon-20Jul-09 DSC\_2986a; Thur-30Jul09

very large) fleshy leaves. However, also in the genus, there's a group of smaller plants with smaller flowers. These were known for years as the genus *Doritis* until the molecular-mapping orchid taxonomists reclassified them. Now we have large phals and small phals which is taxonomically simple, but can create a minor problem for the average orchid hobbyist. *Phalaenopsis-ex-Doritis* plants are small and the flowers are small (Fig. 4, 5, & 6), but they make a nice display with an inflorescence which usually stands erect to nearly two feet tall (60 cm) with long-lasting flowers. A plant can be comfortably housed in a very small pot or lattice basket (ca 6 inches diameter, 7-8 cm). Given a warm humid ambience, they proliferate "pups" and soon the 6-inch pot has to give way to a shallow 8-inch by 8-inch lattice basket for several plants. The display is even more striking when the clusters are all in flower at the same time! It's not unthinkable one might even culture two or three plants of each of the above color forms in the same lattice basket. However, plants of different color forms could easily get mixed up with during repotting. Whether culturing a single plant or a "six pack" the pot or lattice basket weight is minimal, which is a way of saying they're "senior citizen friendly"

When de-potted, these plant clusters tend to separate themselves. It's a far cry from the chore of untangling the mass of an overgrown *Cattleya*! Like other phals, they prefer culture ranging from warm to hot, and lower light levels (no direct sun after about ten at the latest!). Having no pseudobulbs, they should never be allowed to become completely dry. Caution: be careful hanging these under a backyard tree! Their fleshy leaves may be picked at by various birds! Back yard chickens will decimate a plant's leaves ask your editor how he knows!), and these leaves are also tasty to Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*; redbirds).

***Oncidium sotoanum* R.Jiménez & Hágsater, Lankesteriana 9: 415 (2010)**

(Mexico south to Costa Rica) The Bird's Beak Oncidium

(non *Oncidium ornithorhynchum* Kunth in F.W.H.von Humboldt, A.J.A.Bonpland & C.S.Kunth, Nov. Gen. Sp. 1: 345 (1816) (W. South America: Colombia, Ecuador, Peru).

Tucked back in your editor's old handwritten records are a few notes concerning Pl#270176-1. *Oncidium ornithorhynchum*. In those days your editor was busy as a pilot, and was in Florida, the Caribbean area, and other places quite frequently, and this orchid plant had originated in Mexico, but was bought - in flower - for the grand sum of \$5 from a vendor in southern Florida. This particular plant remained in flower until late February with panicles of fragrant lilac-colored flowers. Individual flowers are usually a shade less than two centimeters across the wing-like petals (about ¾ of an inch), and are borne on a panicle which becomes somewhat crowded but can reach to 60 cm long and is quite attractive.



Fig. 1. Pl#270708-2. *Oncidium sotoanum*.  
Digital photo DSC\_2701 Sat-21Feb-09.

This North American species went by the name of *Oncidium ornithorhynchum*, but recent studies found that had described a yellow flowered species from the Andes of South America. Hence a new name was needed for this species and *Oncidium sotoanum* was affixed to it. *Oncidium sotoanum* (Figs. 1 & 2) is known from Mexico (Veracruz, Chiapas, and west to Oaxaca) and in Central America from Guatemala south to Costa Rica, but is not recorded in Belize. In nature it is mostly found in humid mixed growth forests and in cloud forests.

This is still another example of how the names change as we learn more about various species and become a little more accurate concerning which particular one was actually described *first*, and what is correctly identified and scientifically described later. They're both members of *Oncidium*, but the northern species was known by the wrong name for over 200 years!

Nomenclatorial problems aside, *Oncidium sotoanum*, the Mexican (for our purposes here) grows in humid mixed forests up to about 1500 meters. Sources note that it "likes a semi-winter rest", but from personal experience, that doesn't exactly seem to be the

case. Indeed, habitat records of this species in countries farther south in Central America don't bear out the "semi-winter rest" idea very well either. Years ago, when plant number Pl#270176-1 was bought in January, 1976, it was in flower and stayed so until late February. Later plant records show it beginning to put up racemes in mid-late October and lasting with flowers until early March.

A multitude of registered hybrids have *Onc. sotoanum* in their ancestry. Two of the most common are *Onc. Sharry Baby* and *Onc. Twinkle*, and -by the way - *Onc. Twinkle* is putting up inflorescences in your editor's big shade house at this time. It flowers on the same schedule as *Onc. sotoanum*! Another old hybrid grown years ago by your editor was *Onc. Ornithocurvum*, the progeny of our present-day *Oncidium sotoanum* and *Oncidium incurvum*, registered by W. W. G. Moir of Hawaii, in 1961. In fact, *O. sotoanum* was so widely used by hybridizers from 1940 through



Pl#210708-24 *Oncidium sotoanum*.  
Digital photo DSC\_2677 Sat-03Jan-09.

2011 that it seems almost easier to ask what it wasn't hybridized with rather than what is was!

**Culture:**

This species does best within a temperature range of 14-24-25° C. (58 to 76-78F.). It has withstood temperatures from 4 to 40°C. (40-104° F., but obviously anything approaching either temperature extreme is not recommended, and especially so at that high-temperature end! A more realistic high-end temperature extreme would be in the mid-90's (about 34°C), and even at this level the humidity level should be high and the air movement moderate. Left in the hot dry summer winds of the south Texas Valley area without frequent moisture. It will go downhill in short order!

For the most part over the years your editor has seen this species cultured in pots, but has personally preferred to grow it on bark, tree fern, or cork mounts (which need, of course, to be watered more frequently). Like a few other species (*Maxillariella tenuifolia*, *Dendrobium kingianum*, etc.), its roots are more wiry than fleshy, and it prefers a more humid ambience with frequent watering but good drainage. A pot that's kept wet and soggy will see it deteriorate rapidly.

Fertilize frequently, but in weak concentrations. Locally, the general fertilizer concentration used is a pint (16 ounces) of 20-10-20 crystals dissolved in 100 gallons of water. This enriched water is sprayed on all plants about every 4th or 5th tank depending on the frequency of the spring-summer rains. Plants that are "heavy feeders" receive hand-sprayed fertilizing (e.g. heavy-leafed large plants such as Lc. Molly Tyler, and large leafed cymbidiums) a little more often. During the winter period when the shade house has been covered and has actually become a greenhouse, the 100 gallon tank may have 20-10-20 crystals added only after 7-8 tanks of water have been sprayed through it.

The most active vegetative growth period for this species is from early February through July-August. When racemes begin to be 10-12 cm long (usually late July), it's a good time to cut back on fertilizing, but continue watering.

Flowering may begin as early as August and continue into February, with the peak month usually in October in the cooler Long Island, New York. In the northern Georgia areas it began flowering in November.

**References**

References in the literature should be read closely as many exist referring to plants from Mexico through Central America. These actually refer to *O. Sotanum* misidentified as *O. ornithorhynchum*. The few referring to South American yellow colored flowers are referring to the actual *O. ornithorhynchum*. The great number of cases will note lilac or purple flowers which keys the reader to *O. sotanum* of the Mexico-Central America range.

A yellow-flowered plant currently available from the commercial firm of EcuaGenera is cited as *O. pyramidale* Lindl., Ann Mag. Nat. Hist. 15: 384 (1845). This nomen is a synonym of the bona fide *O. ornithorhynchum* of South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru).

Closing note: see the inside and outside back covers figures for other easy to grow hybrids. These are fairly small orchid plants, but they're very colorful ones!

\*\*\*\*\*