

## **ORCHIDS WE SHOULD ALL GROW CATTLEYA PURPURATA**

I am often asked, "If you could grow only one orchid, which one would it be?" *Brassovola nodosa* would be a candidate because of its delightful presentation and aroma. *Aerides odorata*, with its spectacular display of multiple spikes covered with a profusion of intense smelling tiny flowers would be another candidate. No list would be complete without *Rhyncholaelia digbyana* with its frilly lip and citrus aroma.

But .... One species stands out in my mind above all others. If I selected only one species, I could grow over 100 named varieties of it. *Cattleya purpurata* is that special selection. Varieties start blooming in early May and continue until late June. Color range is from pure white to intense dark pink, and whites and stripes with many colored lips. Some of my favorites are *Shusteriana*, with its pure white petals and striking purple lip, *Rubra*, (red in Portuguese), and *Carnea* with its delicate pink lip.

There is perhaps no other orchid in the world with enough different named varieties to have an entire show of its own. Even *Cattleya mossiae* and  *trianae*, with over 100 named varieties each, do not have the varieties and diverse color selection of *Cattleya purpurata*. With 4 FCC awards and over 138 total AOS awards, this species is one of the most highly recognized and awarded orchids of all time.

After a century of being misclassified as a *Laliera* because it has 8 pollinia, *purpurata* was finally reclassified a *Cattleya* after extensive DNA examination. It is one of 6 large Cats from Brazil that were *Lalieras* for all of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Imagine a *Cattleya* with a 6-8" flower growing on a pseudobulb that can reach 20" from base to tip of leaf. They were classified with Mexican *Lalieras* which are often no larger than your fist. They were so classified only because they have 8 pollinia unlike other large Catts which have only 4 pollinia.

*C purpurata* often has 4-5 large 6-8" spectacular flowers. Many are large whites with brilliantly colored lips, royal purple to pink. In some varieties, the reds spread to the petals and sepals (particularly in the *flammea* varieties). There are also several *coerulea* and light lavender albescence varieties that produce some of the finest *Cattleya* hybrids to be found.

There are many *purpurata* hybrids. It passes on its narrow petals and brilliant lip tendencies. Perhaps the most famous of all is *LC Canhamiana*, a cross of *purpurata* and *C. mossiae*. The original cross of *mossiae coerulea* and *purpurata werkhauerii* produced the spectacular *Canhamiana 'Azure Sky'*.

In the 1940's and 50's, semi alba varieties of *purpurata* were the spring wedding flower of choice. Tens of thousands were grown for the wedding trade.

**Cattleya purpurata** is native to the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina where it grows from sea level to several thousand feet. It grows warm and bright like most of the large sized Catts. Growth usually begins in mid to late summer and matures in mid winter when sheaths form. After a rest of several weeks, buds begin to form and the species bloom in late spring. After it flowers, give the plant a rest and dry period of several weeks to a month. Do not stop watering completely or the pseudobulbs will shrivel.

Above are pictures of several color forms including the very rare *Cinnarosa*.

