

Orchid Names: The Basics

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Overview

Introduction

When you are new to the orchid hobby, orchid names can be quite daunting to learn. Nevertheless, learning these names is often a rewarding challenge and after a short time the names of many orchids become second nature.

Orchid names can be divided into two broad groups: species and hybrids. Orchid species occur naturally in the wild and names consist of the genus name and the specific epithet or species name (e.g., *Cattleya mossiae*). Except for naturally occurring hybrids, orchid hybrids are man-made and consist of the genus name and the hybrid name, usually chosen by the hybridizer (e.g., *Cattleya* Circle of Life).

While this report is aimed at the beginner, intermediate and even experienced orchid growers will find useful information about the proper use of both species and hybrid orchid names. Let's begin that journey.

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Cattleya mossiae
(species)



Cattleya Circle of Life
(hybrid)

Orchid Names: The Basics

Genus species names

Orchid species names follow the traditional binomial nomenclature developed by Carl Linnaeus in the 1700s. The idea is that plants with similar characteristics (and hence similar evolutionary relationships) should be grouped together. Thus, the concept of the genus and species (the binomial) was born to designate a specific group of very similar plants (species) within a larger group with many shared characteristics (genus). The first letter of the genus name is always capitalized and the species name is always lower case, and both names are always in italics. Examples include *Cattleya trianae* and *Paphiopedilum bellatulum*.



Cattleya trianae



Paphiopedilum bellatulum

Natural hybrid names

Natural hybrids between two species are sometimes found in the wild. Once identified and named, the name of these plants include an 'x' between the genus and species names (e.g., *Cattleya x hardyana*). The 'x' is not italicized. The entire name, except the 'x', appears in italics. *Cattleya x hardyana* is a natural hybrid of *Cattleya dowiana* var. *aurea* and *Cattleya warscewiczii* and is found in Colombia. It is important to note that this name is used only for those plants that are wild-collected.

Another way to write a hybrid name is *Cattleya (dowiana* var. *aurea x warscewiczii)*. *Dendrobium x superbiens* is another natural hybrid of two species (*Dendrobium bigibbum x Dendrobium discolor*). This natural hybrid is found in Australia, and was described in 1876 by Heinrich Gustav Reichenbach, a German orchidologist.

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Orchid Names: The Basics, Continued

Natural hybrid names (continued)



Cattleya x hardyana



Dendrobium x superbiens

Including the person's name that described the species

In some orchid articles, the person's name who described the genus or species will also be included as part of the orchid's name. For example, *Phalaenopsis venosa* Shim & Fowlie indicates that Phyu Soon Shim and Jack Fowlie described this well-known species.



Phalaenopsis venosa Shim & Fowlie

Identifying the person or persons that described a species helps to avoid confusion when the same name was used to describe different species. For example, *Cattleya crispa* Lindl. is the accepted name for this species from southeastern Brazil, while *Cattleya crispa* Beer is a synonym for *Laelia marginata* L.O. Williams from northern Brazil. So, what's a synonym?

Synonyms

An orchid species can sometimes have more than one name, which happens when botanists describe a species that was described previously. Usually, the accepted name for an orchid is the name that was published first.

A good example involves the genera *Lycaste*, *Ida*, and *Sudamerlycaste*. *Lycaste* was described originally by John Lindley in 1843 and included many species ranging from Mexico to South America. In 2003, Ann Ryan and Henry Oakley reclassified a section of *Lycaste* predominantly from South America with cream, green, or tan flowers and created the genus *Ida*. This name was widely accepted and in use for many years. However, Morales Archila, described this section as the genus *Sudamerlycaste* a few weeks before the Ryan and Oakley publication, thus making *Ida* a synonym of the genus *Sudamerlycaste*.

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Synonyms (continued)

Because *Ida* was accepted in the orchid world, this name is still seen on name tags and at orchid shows; but, according to the World Checklist of Selected Plant Families, the accepted name is now *Sudamerlycaste*.



Synonyms include
Lycaste cinnabarina Rolfe and
Ida cinnabarina A. Ryan & Oakeley.

Sudamerlycaste cinnabarina

Websites for species names

The World Checklist of Selected Plant Families (formerly the Kew Monocot List) has a searchable database that allows you to find information about the accepted name and synonyms for orchid species and natural hybrids. Additional information includes the date the species or genus was described as well as the persons who named and published the species.

Where am I? > Home > Kew Databases > World Checklist of Selected Plant Families



WORLD CHECKLIST OF SELECTED PLANT FAMILIES

Quick Search

WCSP is an international collaborative programme (view contributors) that provides the latest peer reviewed (view reviewers) and published opinions on the accepted scientific names and synonyms of selected plant families. It allows you to search for all the scientific names of a particular plant, or the areas of the world in which it grows (distribution).

The checklist includes 173 Seed Plant families (View list of included families). Different families are in different stages of review as indicated in the family list. There are currently more than 155 contributors from 22 countries.

Search for a family, genus, or genus plus species e.g. *Gagea pratensis*

Search Find name

http://apps.kew.org/wcsp/prepareChecklist.do?checklist=selected_families%40%40100090420121954649.

The naming of wild plants is governed by the International Botanical Congress. Their rules for naming wild plants are published as the *International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants* (ICN) (formerly known as the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature*). Numerous changes were made recently in the naming of wild plants at a 2011 conference held in Melbourne, Australia, mostly to accommodate the e-world we now live in. More information about the code is available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Code_for_Botanical_Nomenclature

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Hybrid Names Orchid hybridization has been taking place for over 150 years with the first man-made hybrid being *Calanthe Dominyi*, which was registered in 1856. This primary hybrid of two species was made by crossing *Calanthe triplicata* with *Calanthe sylvatica* and is named after its originator, John Dominy. Note that for hybrids, the genus name is italicized but the hybrid name is not italicized and the first letter of each word is capitalized.



Calanthe Dominyi



Paphiopedilum Small World

A hybrid made up of two species is referred to as a primary hybrid. A hybrid made up two hybrids or a hybrid and a species is referred to as a complex hybrid. For example, *Dendrobium Red Emperor* is a complex hybrid of two hybrids: *Dendrobium Benikujyaku* and *Dendrobium New Comet*. This cross can also be written as *Dendrobium Benikujyaku* x *Dendrobium New Comet* or as *Dendrobium* (Benikujyaku x New Comet).

Cultivar Names Cultivar names are given to individual plants (either species or hybrids) that have exceptional qualities. Species and hybrid plants that are awarded by orchid organizations, such as, the American Orchid Society, are usually given a cultivar name. The cultivar name appears after the species or hybrid name and is enclosed in single quotes.

Dendrobium Red Emperor has a well-known cultivar, 'Prince'. Another example is *Cymbidium Voodoo* 'Halloween'. Note that no comma appears between the species or hybrid name and the cultivar name.



Dendrobium Red Emperor 'Prince'



Cymbidium Voodoo 'Halloween'

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Orchid Names: The Basics, Continued

Website for hybrid names

Over 150,000 orchid hybrid names exist. Keeping track of these names is the job of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) in the United Kingdom. The RHS maintains a database of hybrid names along with the parents, the hybridizer, the date of registration, and other pertinent information. This searchable database is available at this internet address:
<http://apps.rhs.org.uk/horticulturaldatabase/orchidregister/orchidregister.asp>.

The International Orchid Register

HOME | Plants > Plant science > RHS Horticultural Database > The International Orchid Register


RHS Horticultural Database

The International Orchid Register

The International Daffodil Register

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How to search Parentage search Grex name search

The register can be searched by two methods...

Parentage Search can be used to identify any grexes from particular

1. seed and pollen parents
2. grexes

It should be noted that all dates of registration prior to 1990 are given to the year only (e.g. 1 / 1 / 65)

If you have a further inquiry about the names of orchid hybrids and/or their parents, it should be made to the International Orchid Registrar, at the following address: 83 Victoria Road, Selston, Nottinghamshire, NG16 6AR, UK. Tel. 0044 1773 511814. fax. 0044 115 876 7963. Email: orcreg@rhs.org.uk.

The naming of man-made hybrids is governed by the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (ICNCP, Cultivated Plant Code)*. More information is available at
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Code_of_Nomenclature_for_Cultivated_Plants.

Orchid Trade Names

With the popularity of orchids increasing along with the ease of mass-producing flowering plants, many businesses now carry a nice selection of *Cattleya*, *Phalaenopsis*, *Paphiopedilum*, *Dendrobium*, and *Oncidium*.

While often these plants are sold without names, occasionally a tag can be found with the orchid trade name. To protect their investment, many companies will use a marketing name to identify the orchid and sell the orchid using their proprietary trade designation. Their trade name is often unique to the company and is not the official registered name of the hybrid.

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Orchid Trade Names (continued)

An example is *Phalaenopsis* MINI DEER. The proper way to write trade names is to italicize the genus name and to place the trade name in all caps with no quotation marks. The first letter of each word in the trade name should have a slightly larger font than the remaining capital letters. While these plants can be judged for ribbon awards at an AOS-sanctioned show, they cannot be judged for AOS awards because the parents cannot be identified.



Phalaenopsis MINI DEER

More information about Trade Names can be found at this website:

http://www.internationalplantnames.com/HTML/English/how_to_use_the_list.htm

Orchid Abbreviations

The genus name for orchids is often abbreviated. For example, *Guarianthe aurantiaca* can be abbreviated as *Gur.* *Aurantiaca*. Some of the more common abbreviations follow:

<i>Phalaenopsis</i>	<i>Phal.</i>	<i>Paphiopedilum</i>	<i>Paph.</i>
<i>Oncidium</i>	<i>Onc.</i>	<i>Vanda</i>	<i>V.</i>
<i>Epidendrum</i>	<i>Epi.</i>	<i>Cymbidium</i>	<i>Cym.</i>

Only genera used in hybridizing have approved abbreviations, which are assigned by the RHS at the time of registration. If no hybrids are registered with a natural genus, the entire name can be spelled out the first time in a document and then abbreviated with the first letter as is done in botanical publications. A complete listing of genera and the appropriate abbreviation is available at <http://midamericanorchids.org/judging/>



Gur. aurantiaca



Onc. Palmyra 'Golden Girl', AM/AOS

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American Orchid Society Awards

The American Orchid Society (AOS) grants awards to orchids and exhibitors; and, these awards should be included as part of the plant's name. For example, a name might be written as AM/AOS, which signifies that this plant was given an award of merit for flower quality by the AOS. Note that a comma appears between the cultivar name and the award designation.

If a plant has awards from more than one organization, the awards are listed alphabetically by organization. For example, if a plant has awards from the AOS and the RHS, the AOS award is listed first.

Some of the more common AOS awards follow:

HCC (Highly Commended Certificate): Awarded to orchid species or hybrids scoring 75 to 79 points inclusive on a 100-point scale.

AM (Award of Merit): Awarded to orchid species or hybrids scoring 80 to 89 points inclusive on a 100-point scale.

FCC (First Class Certificate): The highest flower-quality award, awarded to orchid species or hybrids scoring 90 points or more on a 100-point scale.

JC (Judges' Commendation): Given for distinctive characteristics that the judges unanimously feel should be recognized but cannot be scored in the customary ways.

CBR (Certificate of Botanical Recognition): Awarded to rare and unusual species with educational interest that has received no previous awards. The entire plant must be exhibited. This award is granted provisionally and filed with the judging center Chair pending taxonomic verification supplied by the exhibitor.

CHM (Certificate of Horticultural Merit): Awarded to a well-grown and well-flowered species or natural hybrid with characteristics that contribute to the horticultural aspects of orchidology, such as aesthetic appeal. This award is granted provisionally and filed with the judging center Chair pending taxonomic verification supplied by the exhibitor.

CCM (Certificate of Cultural Merit): Awarded to the exhibitor of a well-flowered specimen plant of robust health. The plant must score between 80 and 89 points inclusive on a 100-point scale.

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**American
Orchid Society
Awards**
(continued)

CCE (Certificate of Cultural Excellence): Awarded to the exhibitor of a well-flowered specimen plant of robust health. The plant must score more than 90 points on a 100-point scale. Plants receiving this award represent the highest level of orchid culture.

PS
C. warneri
Moore ex
Warner

Often you will see an orchid name written as *Cattleya warneri* T.Moore ex R.Warner. This means that T. Moore named the plant and that R. Warner wrote and published the taxonomist description establishing the plant as a new species.

PS
When not to
capitalize genus

When do you not capitalize and italicize genus names? Whenever you add an 's' to a genus name the name is not capitalized nor is in italics. The genus name also is not capitalized or in italics when it acts as an adjective. For example, laelias are placed in the cattleya alliance because they are closely related to *Cattleya labiata*, the type species for cattleyas.

A good rule of thumb to use is if you can replace the genus name with the genus and species name, the genus name is italicized and first letter is capitalized. If you can't, the genus name is not italicized and the first letter is not capitalized.

When you learn to not capitalize correctly, you're sending the message.....
I know the rules of nomenclature.
