

Summer Phalaenopsis Species

Colorful Flowers from Nature's Hand/Text by Thomas Mirenda/Photographs by James Osen



[1] *Phalaenopsis lueddemanniana*, with its pendent, heavily laden spikes, makes a wonderful mounted specimen.

LIKE SMALL JEWELS NESTLED IN mossy tree limbs in the jungles of Southeast Asia, luxuriating in the humid shade of tropical wet forests, many precious handsome *Phalaenopsis* species await the discovery of most orchid growers. Generally no more difficult to grow than most of the standard hybrids, these species boast terrific exotic shapes, patterns and colors not often seen in the complex standard phalaenopsis. Even though my recent trip to Taiwan (see page 606) has enlightened me to the pleasures and glories of phalaenopsis hybrids, there will always be something about the species that remain extraordinary and wonderful beyond breeding achievements.

It would be hard for any hybrid to put on a more glorious show than does *Phalaenopsis lueddemanniana*, with its fantastically yellow and amethyst patterned, lightly fragranced flowers produced in great profusion in the summer, or its close relative *Phalaenopsis hieroglyphica*, with its gorgeous purple and lavender ancient "script" decorating its pale cream-colored segments. Although the flowers, are smallish, the dark, rich and waxy purple petals and sepals of *Phalaenopsis pulchra* display a color and texture rarely seen, even in the orchid world. All of these species are proud denizens of the Philippines. The inflorescences of these *Phalaenopsis* species must never be cut as they

generally always produce keikis (plantlets) after they bloom and will flower again in season on those same spikes. While they can certainly be grown in pots, the cascading effect of large plants grown in a basket or on a mount is a glorious sight.

Among the prettiest flowers to be found among the summer-flowering species are the colorful spotted blooms of *Phalaenopsis bastianii*. Splendidly displayed on an erect branching inflorescence, often with a cream or yellow background, these flowers are often overlaid with brilliant spots in various shades of rusty brown, red, cerise and magenta, making for some extraordinarily beautiful displays. This rather variable species is often labeled as *Phalaenopsis mariae* in collections, but it is probably fair to say that most of us have never laid eyes on the real *Phal. mariae*, which differs in having a pendent inflorescence with more cup-shaped (though beautifully hued) flowers and less of a propensity to keiki.

Several lovely yellow species are also likely to flower this month, including *Phalaenopsis fasciata*, a true beauty long admired for its color and form. It's another Philippine native that has been used extensively in breeding to produce yellow hybrids. *Phalaenopsis amboinensis*, found in Amboina and Sulawesi, has long been another mainstay of breeding yellow hybrids due to its background color and bloom longevity. Hailing from India, the waxy long-lasting flowers of *Phalaenopsis mannii* cluster just above the plant.

Mostly warm-growing plants, many of these summer-flower phalaenopsis do not benefit from the cool winter temperature dip that triggers blooming in standard phalaenopsis. Instead, they need warmer temperatures and really thrive when kept just above 80 F (26 C) during the day and in the mid 60s F (18 C) at night.

Phalaenopsis species have an inherent subtlety and charm that is lacking in most hybrids, no matter how spectacular those may be. The species described here are all fantastic subjects for anyone's collection.

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- [2] The brilliant flowers of *Phalaenopsis bastianii* are often mistaken for the rare and elusive *Phalaenopsis mariae*.
- [3] Hailing from India, the flowers of *Phalaenopsis mannii* have exceptional long-lasting qualities.
- [4] *Phalaenopsis fasciata* has been used to create many of the yellow-barred hybrids.
- [5] The charming flowers of *Phalaenopsis amboinensis* are a welcome sight in midsummer when other phalaenopsis flowers are scarce. Grower: All plants on these pages were grown in the Smithsonian Institution's orchid collection.