

# Lycaste Orchids



Lycaste cruenta

- Genus named by Lindley in 1842
- Consists of 52 species endemic to Central America and bounded by the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn – that is Mexico to Peru/Southern Brazil including Cuba and the West Indies.
- Found at sea level to 3000 metres
- Can be epiphytic, lithophytic or terrestrial

- Can be seen in a range of diverse climatic conditions based on geographic and altitudinal variations
- The derivation of the name Lycaste is somewhat confused. What seems clear is that some of the derivations refer to the colour white in association with the name, Lycaste. The first Lycaste named was *virginalis* (*skinneri* alba) which is a large pure white flower. This may help explain the Lindley name.
- Lycastes in general are easy to grow, however as mentioned above, different needs for different ones.
- Regarded as evolved from the more primitive Anguloa genera.
- Cultivation really only began in Australia in the 1960's
- Fred Alcorn in the 70's and 80's did a lot of breeding of exhibition Lycastes.
- The species divide into four sections, which if explained will help with cultivation.

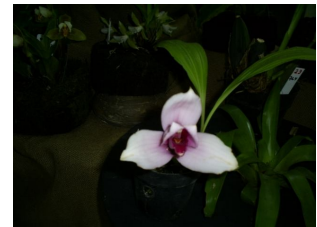
## Sections:

### Deciduosae

Northern most group in geographic terms – Mexico to Colombia – deciduous habit, hence limited water in winter – climate has a wet season and a dry season – species are *brevispatha*, *deppei*, *aromatica*, *tricolor*, *cruenta*, *bradeorum*, *campbelli* and *crinita* - all have 40 chromosomes and are easy to grow under our conditions – remember the winter watering.

### Macrophyllae

Most widely distributed section – Guatemala to Bolivia (Central to South America) - considered the most recently evolved section – largest and most colourful flowers – Species are *skinneri*, *dowiana*, *macrophylla*, *leucantha* – all have 40 chromosomes – *macrophylla* and *dowiana* are easy to grow while *skinneri* can be a little tricky.



Lycaste skinneri

### Longisepalae

Only one species, *schilleriana* – found from Peru to Colombia – they have extremely long sepals – have 40 chromosomes.

### Fimbriatae

Considered the oldest section within the genus and is the largest section – From Jamaica, Cuba to Brazil – Chromosomes 44 to 50, indicating significant variation from other three sections – grow at altitude above 1500 metres – characterised by fimbriation of the lip – colours generally green to orange. Species are *andreettae* - *barbifrons* – *barringtoniae* – *ciliata* – *denningiana* – *dyeriana* – *fimbriata* – *fragrans* – *fulvescens* – *grande* – *hirtzii* – *linguella* – *locusta* – *longipetala* – *longiscapa* – *mathiasae* – *nana* – *peruviana* – *reichenbachia* – *trifoliata* – rarest and most difficult to obtain in Australia – cool growers and are considered collector's items (I'd master the others first) – difficult to breed between Fimbriata section and other sections owing to chromosome differences.

## How I Grow Them.....

They are not hard to grow and are regarded as cool growing orchids.

**Bushhouse** Mine grow on the southern wall of a covered bush house under 55% lazarlite. They have overhead watering and foggers and can be equally grown under shade cloth noting need to watch deciduous ones in winter.

**Temperature range** - Approx. 3 degrees C. to 45 degrees C. Best if temperatures are kept to low 30's. I use foggers to keep humidity up and temperatures down to cool plants. NB *skinneri* types and *fimbriata* group don't like high temperatures.

**Air movement** - is important as with all orchids – leaves are big and soft and will spot badly in poor air movement - high humidity – air movement helps keep temperature in check.

**Light** 50% to 60% shade – no direct sun.

**Fertilizer and Water** - Same as all my orchids – twice a week in summer and once in winter, except deciduous orchids (once every 2 or 3 weeks) Fertilise about once a month – don't allow plants to dry out in warm summer months as with heat this can stress plants.

**Mix** - I use bark – large plants in small/medium grade 50-50 – some use Cymbidium mix – peat and perlite could work.

**Repotting/Dividing/Pots** - I repot every 2 years – wait until new growths about 10 -15 cms high, this is when new roots should just be starting – they have a tangled root ball so need to be careful when thinning as many/most look dead but are OK – I use squat pots as they have good drainage – *skinneri* types I find don't like being divided – only in pots just large enough to fit root system.

**Pests** - Same as other orchids – I don't find many attacks them – occasional scale - leaves will black spot.

**Some other stuff** - Judging standards allow some reflexing with flowers as it's natural – when exhibitions first come out they will often reflect all the way backand then come forward – many especially *skinneri* types only have 2-3 growth eyes per bulb, need to be careful – *skinneri* hybrids don't like to be repotted / divided – They have bred *Lycastes* with: - *Augoloas*, *Zygopetalums*, *Maxillarias*, *Cochleanthes* and *Bifrenarias*. Personally I'd only look at *Angulocastes*, others I wouldn't waste time with – careful with deciduous ones as they have spines at the base of the leaf that remains when the leaf falls off – can be 2-3 cms long.

**Ones to look for** - *deppei* hybrids produce mass of 3 - 4 flowers and long lasting and then will produce 1 and 2 flowers for a few months thereafter – easy to grow here

*Cruenta* hybrids - big yellow flowers – lots of them – don't mind heat

*Augolea* hybrids – don't mind heat – big plants

Exhibition hybrids - everyone wants to grow them – difficult to get and can be expensive - I would suggest only get a couple of seedlings as Brisbane may be a bit warm – maybe peat and perlite or sphagnum moss may be better



*Lycaste aromatica*

Yellow deciduous ones – *aromatica* – bullet proof

I would start with *deppei* and deciduous ones before moving to exhibition types.

From a talk given by Darryl Banks at the Glasshouse Country Orchid Society Show

These notes have been used at our Cultural and New Grower's Meetings. They are from various sources and we thank the authors. All articles are supplied in good faith and the Bribie Island Orchid Society and its members will not be held responsible for any loss or damage.