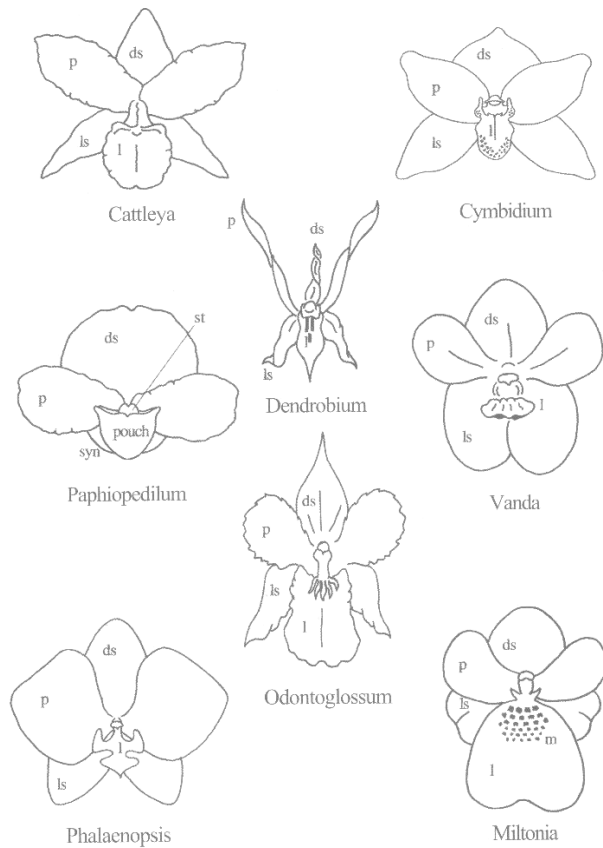


## JUDGING AN ORCHID BY ITS FLOWER

The definitive source for judging orchids is the AOS handbook. The intent of this article is to provide simple flower judging system<sup>2</sup> for new plant owners and the public to evaluate an orchid.

The following diagram provides a simple representation of 9 classes of orchids. Only the left hand side of the flower is labeled.



### Floral Parts of Selected Orchid Genera

ds	dorsal sepal
ls	lateral or central sepal
syn	synsepal in Paphiopedilium
p	petal
l	labellum or lip
m	mask
st	staminode

<sup>2</sup> We will focus on flower judging, we will not include Cultural Merit or Excellence, Horticultural Merit or plant groupings/cut flowers or Educational value in this discussion. Other measurements such as improvement over the parent plants will not be used in the interests of providing a simple judging system.

Based on the diagram, we will use three criteria to judge the orchid flower. Each of these categories is given equivalent weights or measures.

1. How close is the orchid flower to the AOS ideal.
2. Is the colour clear, bright and harmonious.
3. Is/are the flower(s) well displayed?

## CATTLEYA AND ALLIED GENERA

Generally, the flower is full and round. Imagine a circle around the flower, the tips of the petals and sepals and the margin of the lip touching the edge of the circle; and with the flower filling in most of the circle.

- The sepals should be arranged in an equilateral triangle. The petals and lip in an inverted equilateral triangle
- The lip should be in proportionate to the petals.
- The flower should be flat when viewed from the side, with the lip curving down.



The colour of the flower should be clear, bright, strong and evenly dispersed, without 'washing out' at the mid veins.

- Any spotting or splashing should be balance and harmonious.
- The lip should be richly coloured, blending or contrasting with the rest of the flower.

Other characteristics:

- High degree of substance
- Texture should be sparkling, crystalline, velvety or waxy
- More than one flower should be displayed
- The stems should be strong and upright, displaying the flowers to each flower's best advantage (one flower does not crowd the other).



**CYMBIDIUM**

The flower is generally round and full, but not to the same degree as in Cattleya. Some cultivars have a more open, star-like appearance, while other forms are somewhat cupped.

- The sepals should be broad and arranged in a equilateral triangle, filling in the gaps between the petals and the lip.



The colour should be definite and clear. Suffusion of one colour over another should be regular and harmonious, not mottled or muddy. The lip should be as distinctively coloured as the sepals and petals, with markings in definite and distinctive patterns.

The inflorescence should be erect or gracefully arching. Flowers should be well spaced and well displayed

**DENDROBIUM**

Flower — there is no general criteria as the genus is large and diverse. Typically,

- Cattleya criteria may be used for Dendrobium nobile.
- Phalaenopsis criteria may be used for Dendrobium Phalaenopsis.
- For others, use the point scale provided below.



**MILTONIA**

The general flower form is toward fullness, roundness and flatness

- Petals and sepals should be equal to each other.
- The lip, predominately large, symmetrical and not too notched.



Colour:

- Definite, clear and unblemished.
- The mask, if present, should be symmetrical and well defined.



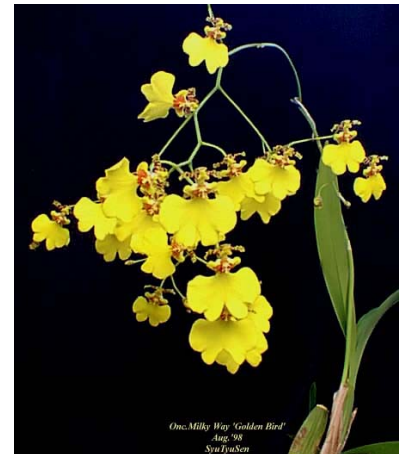
The inflorescence should be gracefully arching, with flowers well spaced and well displayed.

**ODONTOGLOSSUM**

The flower tends toward fullness, roundness and flatness, as in Cattleyas.

The colour of the flower must be definite and clear, in well defined patterns.

The flower should be large and of good substance. The inflorescence should be gracefully arching, with flowers well spaced and well displayed.



**PAPHIOPEDILUM**

The great variety from species to primary hybrids to modern complex hybrids makes a uniform set of criteria impossible to define.

The flower colour should be clear and definitive in well defined areas and patterns or harmoniously suffused.

Other characteristics

- The stem should be proportionally tall and strong, holding the flower(s) well above the foliage.
- Complex hybrid flowers should be round or broadly oval, with emphasis on fullness, balance and proportion.
- The texture should be waxy or varnished. Size is based on the overall spread of the flower.



**PHALAENOPSIS**

The flower is generally toward fullness, roundness, flatness and with substance

- The sepals should be arranged into an equilateral triangle, with the dorsal sepal larger and broader.
- The petals should fill in the gaps between the sepals and be flat.



Flower colour should be definite and clear.

- Markings, if present, should be pleasing.
- The lip should be distinctly marked or coloured.

The inflorescence should arch gracefully with flowers well spaced and well displayed. At least half the flowers should be open.

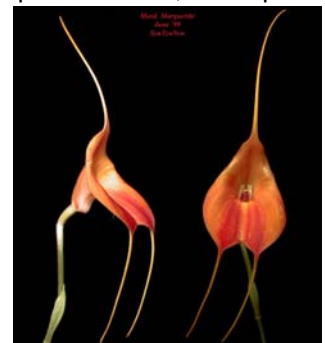


**PLEUROTHALLIDS**

Masdevillia have flowers of striking colours and relatively flat in form. Other pleurothallids, the sepals may be narrow, twisted or unusual; the form cup-shaped, bowl-shaped or tubular. What is important is the overall aesthetic appearance.

Flower colours are varied, from brilliant to drab.

- The colour of the flower should be clear.
- Suffusion of one colour over another should be regular and harmonious, not muddy or blotched.
- Stripes, spots or blotches, if present, should be distinct.
- Hairs, if present, should enhance the overall appearance.



Other characteristics

- The inflorescence may be erect or not, but the shape should be long and strong enough to display the flowers well.
- Pleurothallids are normally floriferous.
- The texture of the flowers varies from glossy to matte.



**VANDA**

The general flower form is toward fullness, roundness and flatness.

- The sepals broad and rounded, arranged in a near equilateral triangle. The dorsal sepal should be nearly equal to the lateral sepals.



- The petals should be broad and rounded, filling the gaps between the sepals.
- The lip should be harmonious with the rest of the flower in size and shape.

Flower Colour:

- Should be definite and clear.
- Suffusion of one colour of anther should be regular and harmonious, not mottled or muddy.
- Coloured venations, if present, should be definite and distinctive or in regular lines and patterns.
- The lip should be distinctively coloured.

The inflorescence should be erect or arched gracefully, with flowers well spaced and well displayed. The inflorescence should be mature enough to show the full potential of the flower.

*The pictures provided in this article are copyrighted and used by permission from SyuTyuSen. The Orchid Photo Album by SyuTyuSen can be found at <http://www.edit.ne.jp/~fkoichi/>*

**POINT SCALE**

Based on the above description, points can be awarded based on flower colour and flower presentation. The point system proposed in this table is a simplification of the AOS Flower Quality Scale.

The total for each of the three categories is shown in the shaded row.

	<b>Cattleya</b>	<b>Cymbidium</b>	<b>Dendrobium</b>	<b>Miltonia</b>	<b>Odontoglossum</b>	<b>Paphiopedium</b>	<b>Phalaenopsis</b>	<b>Pleurothallid</b>	<b>Vanda</b>
<b>Flower</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>
General Form	15	15	15	15	15	20	15	20	15
Sepals, Petals, Labellum & Caudae	15	15	15	15	15	20	15	15	30
<b>Colour of Flower</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>
General Colour	15	15	15	15	15	20	15	20	15
Sepals, Petals & Labellum	15	15	15	15	15	20	15	15	15
<b>Other Characteristics</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>40</b>
Size of Flower	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Substance and Texture	10	20	10	10	10	5	10	7	10
Habit and arrangement of inflorescence(s)	10		10	10	10		10	5	10
Floriferousness and/or stem	10	10	10	10	10	5	10	8	10