

'Cymbidium Chatter'

Edition 3d April 2020

Right: from Barrita Orchids - Peace 'Clean & Bright'



At the time of writing it is just over a week before the declaration of the State of Emergency ends. I think we all deserve a pat-on-the back for maintaining our isolation, whether or not restrictions are relaxed will depend on circumstances closer to the 11 May. In the meantime stay safe and well, and keep up the great work!

In this edition of Cymbidium Chatter, Joshua White, looks at the very beautiful Cymbidium species erythraeum, with a focus on the alba form. Thanks once again Joshua for your interesting article!

I am getting some great support from several quarters - overseas, interstate and local growers. Please remember if you have any flowers out, take a photo and email them to me, thanks!

It is getting late in the season in the US, however, Pierre Pujol still has some great flowers to share with us. Special thanks to Pierre for allowing his photos and posts to be shared!



Every year, I trim down my collection to make space for new plants, but this Cym. Piñata Magic 'Stirling' (Polka Magic x Piñata Royale) always makes the cut. Large flowers, bold purple spots, and open lip on arching spikes. Good grower for a Piñata. Hybridized by Orchids Royale



You can always count on the party **stalwarts** for the late-season bloom. Here is Cym. *devonianum* 'Featherhill' 4n, a tetraploid cultivar heavily used for breeding small size and floriferous progeny. Enjoy!

— *Cymbidium erythraeum* —

By Joshua White

Cym. erythraeum is a cool-growing epiphytic and lithophytic species. At first glance, this diminutive species appears to be rather unimpressive when compared to its larger and more dramatic close relative, *Cym. tracyanum*. However, it is worth growing in its own right and has its own unique charm.

It is the smallest species of the Iridioides Complex – the group of species comprising *Cym. iridioides*, *Cym. tracyanum*, *Cym. erythraeum* and *Cym. hookerianum*. Like the other members of this group, it blooms once per bulb and (with the exception of *hookerianum*) suffers leaf-tip dieback if not provided with clean water. So far I have found Melbourne water to be acceptable for these species, although have received reports from Perth that *tracyanum* and *iridioides* suffer significant leaf-tip dieback with their water.

In my experience it is relatively easy to grow, requiring similar care to other species in the group.

Currently, *Cym. erythraeum* is classified into two different varieties:

1. *Cym. erythraeum* var. *erythraeum*, the original type species from India, and
2. *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum*, found in China (originally designated as *Cym. flavum*).

Both varieties share several traits in common:

- Long, narrow foliage
- Blooming once per bulb (this is also shared by all other members of the Iridioides Complex)
- Scented (another trait common to the Iridioides Complex), though not as strongly as *tracyanum*
- Alba forms

Cym. erythraeum var. *erythraeum*

The original type species was described by Lindley in 1859 from a collection made by J.D. Hooker in Sikkim, India. Unfortunately the name *Cym. longifolium* has been incorrectly used for it for many years, when in fact the original *longifolium* specimen has been demonstrated to be *Cym. elegans*.

The blooms of *Cym. erythraeum* var. *erythraeum* share some traits with *iridioides*, featuring stripes on the tepals and a tapered lip. However, that is where the similarity ends; the tepals are long and narrow and the lip is white with few spots.

This variety is easily distinguished from the Chinese var. *flavum* by the following:

- The blooms tend to be rectangular in shape with less curvature of the ventral sepals.
- The aforementioned shape of the lip (tapering like *Cym. iridioides*).
- A weakly-arching spike.

Both colour forms of *Cym. erythraeum* var. *erythraeum* are in cultivation in Australia, with perhaps the most well-known alba clone being 'Lois'. Selfings of 'Lois' have been made available through nurseries such as Barrita Orchids and have started to flower this year, as shown in the photos on the next page. This is my favourite form of the species.



A closeup of a single bloom of *Cym. erythraeum* var. *erythraeum* f. *album*.



A selfing of 'Lois' on its first flowering with 8 flowers on the spike.

Cym. erythraeum var. *flavum*

This variety was first described by Z.J. Liu & S.C. Chen in 2002 as *Cym. flavum*. The name likely derived from the fact that the alba form was found first, followed by the more common regular form. It was merged into *Cym. erythraeum* as a variety in 2009 (although it is arguable that it should be kept separate as a distinct species).

Cym. erythraeum var. *flavum* bears a strong resemblance to *Cym. tracyanum* and for good reason – a 2019 study showed that the two species are siblings. With the exception of the lip, this variety looks very much like a smaller version of *tracyanum*. The lip itself is rounded, like *tracyanum*, but lacks the ruffled edge, strong spotting and hairy callus ridges of that species.

Several key features differentiate var. *flavum* from the Indian var. *erythraeum*:

- The tepals are more falcate (the ventral sepals in particular curve forward).
- The lip is wider and more rounded.
- The spike is long and high arching, making it useful for improving spike length in hybrids.
- It blooms off small plants (a valuable trait for breeding).

Probably the most well-known clone of this variety is 'Paradise' CBR-ACE-FCC/AOC, owned by Royale Orchids and, to the best of my knowledge, used for all of their crosses involving *Cym. erythraeum*.



A very small plant at the July 2019 COSV meeting demonstrating the long, high arching spike.



Comparison of the regular and alba forms of the species. Photo courtesy of Andy Easton.

Use in Hybridisation

The late Kevin Hipkins of Royale Orchids used the species significantly, including crossing the two different varieties ('Paradise' X 'Lois'); seedlings of which started to bloom in 2018. The species has been involved in a number of primary hybrids, with varying degrees of success. Some of these are:



Cym. No Hope (*erythraeum* X *mastersii*), shown at the June 2018 COSV meeting.

- Teeny Weeny (x *devonianum*)
- Gammieanum (x *elegans*, which also exists as a natural hybrid)
- Memoria Neal Crosswhite (x *erythrostylum*)
- Vingtaine de Samares (x *insigne*)
- Toni Benton (x *iridioidies*)
- An unregistered cross with *lowianum*
- No Hope (x *mastersii*)
- Ken Siew (x *tracyanum*)

Five of the above crosses were Kevin's work. He also used the species in a number of his hybrid lines, with Arachnid (x Death Wish) probably being the most well-known. Arachnid has been remade at least three times that I am aware of:

- Death Wish 'Dark Invader' X *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum* 'Paradise' (released 2015)
- *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum* 'Paradise' X Death Wish 'Withering Glance' (released 2018)
- *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum* 'Paradise' X Death Wish 'Dreamtime' (released 2018)



Cym. Ken Siew (*erythraeum* X *tracyanum*) at Cal-Orchid (2019).



Cym. Arachnid (Death Wish 'Dark Invader' X *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum* 'Paradise').

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