

Why Buy More Than 1?

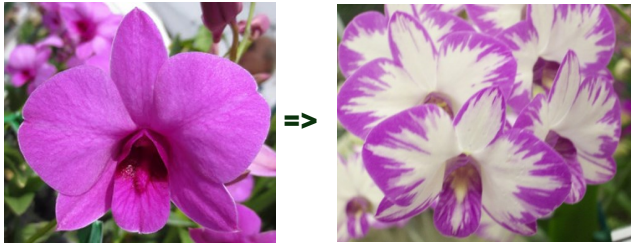
When adding orchids to your collection, there are several considerations. First up, are you more interested in species, hybrids, or both?

In either case, if you want to know what you are buying, then you should only buy plants in bloom - or, plants that the seller can document with a photo guaranteed to be from the plant you are buying.

In most species, while there is some variation from plant to plant, it is rarely significant (except, perhaps, to the eye of a few AOS judges). In hybrids, it is a different matter. With genetic input from two possibly very different plants, the resulting flowers can vary very significantly.

Obviously, if you buy a mericlone, you know what you are getting, regardless of the size of the plant. That is, unless you happen to pick one of the extremely rare mutations; a couple of examples are:

- In a batch of thousands of mericlones of a purple ***Dendrobium Enobi Purple***, one random mutation stood out:



Thus, the '**Splash**' clone came into being.

- In a mericlone population of ***C. Caudebec 'Carmela' HCC/AOS***, several somewhat stockier plants were seen. These plants were spontaneous tetraploids (4N), which produce larger flowers (though fewer per inflorescence). Waldor Orchids selected one of these, and gave it the '**Linwood**' clonal name; it was subsequently awarded an AM/AOS.

Here are the two clones photographed in a single photo (2N 'Carmela' on the right, and 4N 'Linwood' on the left).



This brings us to hybrids. If you buy only blooming plants, you can obviously see what you are getting (though mature plants may produce larger, or more, flowers, than what you see on a first bloom seedling).

In real life, many times new hybrids are released long before the first plant is ready to bloom. In these cases, you are quite literally buying 'the cat in the sack'. At that stage it is impossible to predict, whether the cross is going to produce a high or low percentage of 'good' flowers. And, 'good' is of course in the eye of the beholder.

My dad had a retail orchid nursery, where I worked after school & weekends for 9 years, so I have always been cognizant of this issue. While I have a good eye for plants with prospects, this is by no means a foolproof method of picking plants with superior flowers.

When I rekindled my interest in orchids back in the mid 1990's, I always tried to purchase multiple plants (minimum 2, and ideally 4-6) of any seed grown cross. The following photos will illustrate the potential for variations (*photos were taken with various cameras and in ambient light in the greenhouse, so color variations between individual photos are not necessarily true*).

C. Bouncing Rosie

(C. Iodriguesii x C. Haiku Rose; Exotic Orchids of Maui)

I purchased 5 of these, and bloomed them all. Plants were very uniform in growth habit. The flowers show some variation; eventually one plant stood out, once mature it always produced 7 flowers on each inflorescence.

Note: It took 2 years after the initial blooming, before that trait became identifiable.



Rlc. Pauwela Gold

(Rlc. Gorgeous Gold x Rlc. Williette Wong; Exotic Orchids of Maui)

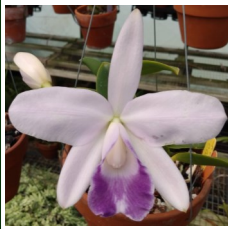
The first two of these bloomed just recently. The first was a very large flower, quite open, but with a gorgeous red lip. The second plant had significantly smaller flowers, but with very good shape. I managed to get both flowers in a single photo for easy comparison.



C. Christina Mendoza

(C. intermedia, var. aquinii x C. Floralia's Azul, Gold Coast Orchids)

Moving on to a different breeder. I purchased at least 4 of these. The first to bloom came through with all the best traits from each of the parents, but the plant is a slow grower.



The next two were again coeruleas, and had larger, but fairly non-descript flowers, so I only photographed



one of them.

The fourth to bloom is a vigorous grower, and has 4 good size flowers on one inflorescence - where the previous 3 plants only produced 2 flowers per inflorescence.

One area of particular interest to me, is Cattleya hybrids with spotted flowers. That brings us to the next breeder, Fred Clarke from Sunset Valley Orchids (though I have some very good spotted Cattleyas from Exotic Orchids of Maui also).

(C. Chinese Bronze x C. Katherine Clarkson, SVO)

When first released, Fred described this cross as 'speculative'. I only ordered 2, but both turned out to be keepers. For comparison (and with permission), I have downloaded the two photos from this cross posted on SVO web site.



From previous SVO breeding, I have bloomed several very good flowers. One of the best crosses is **Rlc. Naomi's Delight** (C. Katherine Clarkson x Rlc. Sun Spots). I have bloomed two with flowers exceeding 4" NS (up to 108 mm), and a smaller one with heavily spotted flowers, and

up to 6 flowers/inflorescence.



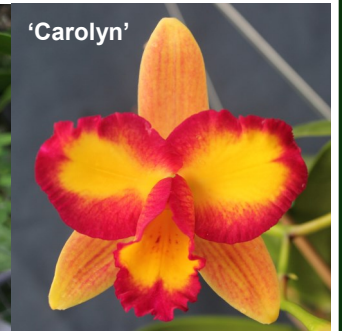
Rth. Princess Su-Lyn

(Rth. Telling Lies x C. Tokyo Life, Sunset Valley Orchids)

I bought 4 of these, and 4 more of the reciprocal cross. First photos of the two parent flowers (courtesy of Sunset Valley Orchids).



These seedlings are blooming out with a very distinct color pattern. I have just bloomed a 3rd plant, with flowers very similar to 'Carolyn', though the petals are not quite as wide.



And for comparison, SVO has bloomed at least one, that is distinctly different (photo at right).



The next example is included in part to illustrate variations introduced by environmental differences. Changes in light and/or temperature, can have significant impact on flower appearances.

Rby. Nosy Williette (Rlc. Williette Wong x B. nodosa)



The two photos on the previous page both show the 'Maplewood' clone, blooming at different times of the year.

The 'Akhtar' clone shown here also has some variation in the width of the center stripe on the lip. It can be somewhat wider than shown in this photo.



Paphiopedilum fairrieianum

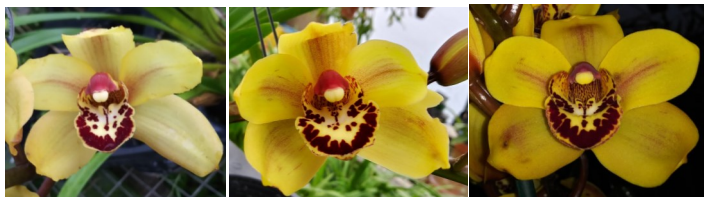
These variations are not restricted to the Cattleya group. Here are three 1st bloom seedlings from the same seed pod:



The one on the left has the smallest, but darkest flower. The other two are quite similar, but the one in the center has the longest stem, and the one on the left has a larger pouch than the flower in the center.

I have found similar variations in Cymbidiums.

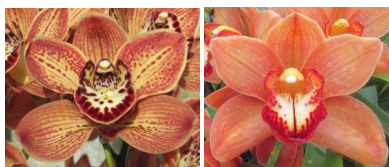
Cym. (Yai x Donovan; originator unknown)



The pod parent has a pink flower, with an almost solid dark red lip. When awarded the plant carried 8-9 flowers per inflorescence. The pollen parent is usually a solid yellow, with high flower count (up to 30 flowers per inflorescence).

This population has bloomed out with good flower count (14-19 flowers per inflorescence), and quite consistent in terms of color. The main variation has been in the shape of the flowers, but all bloomed plants have been 'good' or better.

Cym. (Dosido x Hazel Fay, Casa de las Orquideas)



I happen to own divisions of both parents (photos at left). I am intrigued by the combination of these two early season bloomers, so I have 100 seed-

lings of the reciprocal cross in my greenhouse. In the meantime, I have bloomed a number of plants of the original cross.

The first several were very large, but open flowers, generally somewhat darker than either parent. Then I bloomed my 'keeper':

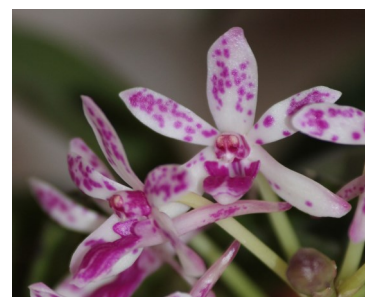


Reciprocal Crosses

According to the RHS, it does not matter whether a plant is (A x B) or (B x A), they consider both to be the same Grex. While that may be true in terms of RHS 'bookkeeping', it is rarely so in real life. There can be very significant differences in both flower characteristics and plant stature.

For example, in **Vandachostylis Pinky** (*Vanda falcata* x *Rhynchostylis gigantea*) the differences are easy to see, since the parents are so different.

When **V. falcata** (formerly *Neofinetia falcata*) carries the seed pod, the plants tend to be very small (6" across, or less), the flower count is low (less than 10-12), and the flowers are star shaped.

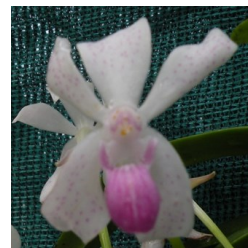


'Starry Night' AM/AOS



'Takahashi'

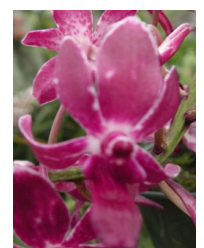
When **Rhy. gigantea** carries the seed pod, the plants are larger (up to 10" across), the flower count is much higher (20-45) and the flower is larger with wider segments.



'Moonlight'



'Fairy Dust'



'Eric the Red'

With such differences, it is advisable to acquire plants made both ways, when available. If you don't, you will never know what you just might have missed!