



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Laelia tenebrosa – That tenebrosa Lip

Ron McHatton writes about *Laelia tenebrosa* on the AOS website:

Cattleya tenebrosa, one of the most spectacular of the former Brazilian laelias, was first described by Rolfe in 1891 as *Laelia grandis* var. *tenebrosa* in reference to its dark color compared to the yellow of *L. grandis*. The name *tenebrosa* doesn't just mean dark but rather implies a mysterious or supernatural quality. Two years later Rolfe, realizing this was a completely different species, described it as *Laelia tenebrosa*, a name that has effectively "stuck" for nearly a hundred years...The species typically produces two or three, very large (over 8") flowers per growth. The sepals and petals of most clones is an unusual bronze or copper-brown and some clones can be exceptionally dark. Like *C. (L.) purpurata*, the petals tend to reflex along the midrib giving many clones a rather open appearance to the flower although line-breeding is beginning to flatten many newer clones. In addition to the typical dark clones a couple of rare yellow cultivars exist. One of these yellow cultivars, *C. (L.) tenebrosa* 'Walton's Grange', FCC/AOS has figured prominently in the background of many exceptionally dark magenta and purple-red hybrids bred from *C. dowiana* and *C. dowiana* var. *aurea*.



Laelia tenebrosa flower



Yellow form of Laelia tenebrosa in bloom

Arthur Chadwick adds his insights from his book *The Classic Cattleyas*:

Laelia tenebrosa is considered by breeders to be dominant for color, large size and deformity-free flowers, as well as excellent plant vigor. It imparts an unbelievable richness to the flowers of its hybrids... In its primary hybrids, *L. tenebrosa* tends to impart a brightness that enriches the color and almost makes it glow...

Courtney says the tenebrosa lip is dominant most of the time in form and color. These pictures of hybrids with tenebrosa show how the purplish tenebrosa lip carries through in its hybrids.



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Laelia purpurata



Laelia Pacavia
(purpurata x tenebrosa)



Cattleya dowiana



Laeliocattleya Luminosa
(dowiana x tenebrosa)



Laelia purpurata



Laelia Pacavia
(purpurata x tenebrosa)



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Cattleya guttata



Laeliocattleya Issy 'SVO' HCC/AOS
(guttata x tenebrosa)



Cattleya schilleriana



Laeliocattleya (now C.) Massangeana
(schilleriana x tenebrosa)
Photo credit: Allen Black



Potinara (now Rhyncattleanthe (Rth.))
Memoria Mario Lanza 'Lenette #20'
(Rlc. Carolina Splendor x Ctt. Chocolate Drop)



Pot. (now Rth.) King Tut 'Hackneau'
(Mem. Mario Lanza x tenebrosa)
Photo credit: Courtney Hackney



Chadwick closes with:

Like so many of our large-flowered Cattleya species, most of the fine old clones of L. tenebrosa have been lost to cultivation and appear only in the rich coloring of our Cattleya hybrids. Laelia tenebrosa today is like the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It is there - but it is not there. Of the sib crosses still being made, we can only hope there are still some genes left that can unlock the grandeur of the past.

Citations and Additional Reading

Chadwick, Arthur. Cattleya tenebrosa, accessed online 7/28/21
<https://chadwickorchids.com/content/cattleya-tenebrosa-laelia>

Hackney, C.T. 2004. *American Cattleyas: Species and Outstanding Clones That Define American Hybridizing*. Wilmington, NC: Courtney T. Hackney, pp. 123-127.

McHatton, Ron. Laelia tenebrosa, accessed online 7/28/21
<https://www.aos.org/orchids/collectors-items/cattleya-tenebrosa.aspx>