

Giant Steps for a "Tiny" Cymbidium

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Near penny-size perfection, miniatures are the small gems of the Cymbidium world.

But it wasn't so long ago that few people had heard of miniature-flowered Cymbidiums, much less seen one. Once introduced, however, these perky orchids, which are only about a third the size of standard Cymbidiums, quickly won a big place in the hearts of enthusiasts. Today they are counted among the most popular plants in many collections.

It was only a few years ago, 1944 to be exact, that a miniature of this type first received official recognition. In that year the Royal Horticultural Society issued an Award of Merit to the plant *Cymbidium* Minuet, and almost immediately these orchids were in widespread demand. It's true that a number of small-flowered varieties had been produced before Minuet, but none had the lustrous color or upright stem quality which won this pink-to-rose variety its international acclaim.

Naturally, this initial success sparked an interest in hybridizers the world over. Soon they were hard at work, trying first one cross, then another, hoping to come up with a prize-winning variety of their own. To date, 289 first generation crosses have been registered, and within the next few years, new introductions will probably double, or even triple, this amount. Every year new types are introduced at showings the world over, and every year the call for more brilliantly colored crosses increases. During the past ten years tremendous advances have been made with the introduction of primary, secondary and now third generation hybrids.

But in spite of the numerous lovely creations which have resulted from all this effort, hybridizers are still certain the surface has only been scratched, where the future of these orchids is concerned. What's more, they look forward to a steady increase in the demand for different varieties of these small, but showy, plants. As evidence, they point to the success other miniature items have had in all countries. After centuries of producing large blooming roses, growers introduced the diminutive Sweetheart approximately 20 years ago, and now it is a favorite type. Miniature poodles, charm bracelets, miniature packages of corn flakes and hundreds of others, including the Volkswagen and transistor radio, indicate the intrigue with every sort of miniature reproduction. And, of course, the small-flowered Cymbidiums make a choice Christmas gift, since many bloom just in time for this holiday. So, advances in hybridization and cultivation techniques are especially important to the commercial grower.

Notwithstanding the praises received by Minuet, it was not until the 1950's that miniaturization of the species re-

ceived large scale recognition. At this time several California growers introduced a group of hybrids that completely captivated the orchid world. Their creation was produced by crossing the short spiked *C. pumilum* species from Japan with a hybrid involving the tall stemmed species *insigne*, also indigenous to Asia. The offspring bloomed under much warmer conditions than possible with a pure *Cymbidium* species. Now enthusiasts could enjoy some *pumilum* hybrids grown under Cattleya conditions. Most, however, still prefer cooler temperatures.

Thus, the search was under way for warmer growing hybrids, as well as perkier, brighter colored ones. The next species to play an important role in producing a miniature which would bloom under warm conditions was *C. ensifolium*. In at least one instance it sired a hybrid (*C. Peter Pan* 'Greensleeves') that blooms up to three times per year. Unfortunately, most hybrids from this species have stems which are somewhat sparse of flowers.

But producing a Cymbidium which would flower at all in warm climates was a significant achievement. Even though miniatures are the only Cymbidiums which will bloom consistently in areas bordering the tropics, some varieties still bloom more profusely than others. Several are at home in either warm or cool climates. This is characteristic of *ensifolium* offspring and hybrids resulting from crosses between standard size plants and *Cymbidium finlaysonianum*, *C. pendulum* or *C. aloifolium*. Like most Cymbidiums, all four are Asian in origin. The drawback with the latter three is that these plants usually grow to a large size before blooming and are, therefore, losing popularity among miniature collectors.

Several other species have the ability to produce a warmer-growing hybrid, but none as popular as *pumilum* has been developed.

Another type with wide appeal is the Indian species *C. tigrinum*. Its hybrids seem to be more at home in the standard, cool Cymbidium house and have blooms approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of those on a true Cymbidium. Even so, their petite petals and unusual lips make them a worthwhile miniature subject.

A shapely, dark brown species, also from India, but which has produced few registered hybrids, is *C. devonianum*. It will incept spikes under both warm and cool conditions, but tends to bury them in the potting mix when approaching maturity. This problem can be solved by planting high in the pot and training the spikes up and over the rim with a plastic tag for a guide.

This glimpse of the world of miniatures only touches upon the most popular of the 20 or so species which have been used in hybridization. As new crosses are produced, we come ever closer to varieties which are easy to grow and are perfect in color, size and shape. A look at what's already been done, and it's no wonder orchid enthusiasts are anticipating more of these miniatures for their collections. And we, too, here at "Acres of Orchids" are looking forward to a great future for "tiny" Cymbidiums.



Cymbidium Starbright 'Ceres' H.C.C./AOS (*C.* Lyoth 'Rinconada' x *C. pumilum* 'Kin-Ryo Hen'). This miniature *Cymbidium* hybrid varies in color from medium to dark pink, and produces fine, upright spikes of flowers each of which is one to two inches across.

Cymbidium Mary Pinchess 'Yellow Cast' H.C.C./AOS (*C. pumilum* x *C. Pajaro*). This miniature *Cymbidium* hybrid, true to its name, bears flowers of strong yellow with an overlay of green with a deep pink in the center of the petals and the lip, making the flowers very distinctive. It has lovely, erect spikes and varies from green through yellow shades

