The RHS Orchid Committee has recently recommended 35 orchids for an Award of Garden Merit (AGM). This series explains why each is considered the best of its type, and advises on how to grow them to ensure reflowering. Part one, in the March 2013 issue, outlined the history of the award, and explained why orchids have been included again. The AGM is awarded to outstanding plants that can be grown either in the garden, a home greenhouse, or as houseplants.

**Cymbidium Icho Tower**

The parents of this grex are *Cymbidium Grands Vaux* × *C. Highland Advent*. It was made by the Eric Young Orchid Foundation, Jersey (EYOF), and registered by them in 1993. This hybrid has proved to be fast growing, and is a good parent plant. The cultivar ‘Trinity’, from EYOF, has a clean yellow flower with a barred red lip, and has been given an Award of Merit by the RHS, and by the American Orchid Society and a Silver Award by the Cymbidium Society of America. In 1995, it won the Grand Champion Cymbidium Award at the Santa Barbara International Orchid Show. This modern hybrid has already made a great impact, being cloned and used in hybridizing from Australia to the UK.

Easy to grow in a cool environment and good for cut flowers, plants reach, on average, 100cm tall with flowers measuring about 15cm across. Each flower spike can carry 12 or more blooms, which can last up to three months given good growing conditions, and a mature plant may carry multiple flower spikes. Flowering takes place from winter to spring with blooming time affected by previous summer conditions and by light levels. This grex grows best with a day temperature around 16°C and night lows of about 10°C. It will survive and bloom outside this temperature range, but not so well. Light levels should always be good but direct sun avoided. Water thoroughly when the growing medium is almost dry and allow to drain. A buoyant atmosphere (good humidity and air movement), would be advantageous. Fertilize regularly and repot after flowering when pot bound, probably every other year. Move the plant outside to a sheltered spot in dappled shade after any danger of frost has passed, and bring it in before the first frosts, gradually acclimatizing it to being back inside. This routine will aid flower spike initiation as *Cymbidium* plants require a definite day to night temperature differential to produce good flower spikes the next season.

**Cymbidium Golden Elf**

The parents of this grex are *Cymbidium ensifolium* × *C. Enid Haupt*. It was made by P Grepp and registered by Rod McLellan Co in 1978. *Cymbidium Golden Elf* is a popular American hybrid, strongly fragrant and summer flowering. This pure yellow-flowered grex lacks any red pigment and is sometimes referred to as a golden-yellow alba. *Cymbidium Golden Elf* usually has flower spikes of about seven blooms. The vibrancy,
The star-shaped flowers of *Cymbidium lowianum* are unlike modern hybrids, and can number 12 to 40 per flower stem. Fragrance and tolerance of this plant more than make up for the fact that its flowers do not last as long as some other *Cymbidium* hybrids and species.

*Cymbidium Golden Elf* can be grown with normal, cool-growing *Cymbidium* plants, but it actually prefers a little more heat. It does not require traditional *Cymbidium* culture as it flowers in summer, so does not need a period outside to encourage spike initiation. However, once it has flowered, it will benefit from being put in a slightly cooler position for six to eight weeks.

Grow it in good light, avoiding direct sun. Water thoroughly when the medium is almost dry and allow to drain. Good humidity and air movement are beneficial. Fertilize regularly and repot after flowering when pot bound, about every two years.

*Oncidopsis Nelly Isler* 7

The parents of this grex are *Miltoniopsis Kensington* × *Oncidopsis Stefan Isler*. It was made and registered by J Isler in 1995. In recent years, due to taxonomic changes relating to *Oncidium*, used in the parentage of this grex, this popular hybrid has also been known as *Barragana* Nelly Isler. It has also been sold as Cambria Nelly Isler. It has been widely micropropagated, especially in Holland, and is produced in thousands all year round, so is widely available. A vigorous grower, *Oncidopsis Nelly Isler* freely produces spikes of attractive, long-lasting, bright red flowers with spotted lips and yellow centres. As an added bonus it is scented. *Oncidopsis Nelly Isler* is an ideal pot plant for a centrally heated home. It prefers day temperatures of about 20°C with nights not below 13°C. Although

*Cymbidium lowianum* 4-8

Found in Myanmar (Burma), southwest China and north Thailand, this species was discovered in 1877 by William Boxall, a collector employed by the nursery of Stuart Low. Named after Low, it was recognized as a species in 1879. Sir Trevor Lawrence, President of the RHS from 1885 to 1913, was one of the first to grow the green variety, described by Rolfe in 1891 as *C. lowianum* var. *concolor*. Now recognized as *C. lowianum* var. *lowianum*, it lacks the dark red colouration. Two other varieties are recognized. *Cymbidium lowianum* var. *ailaoense* was described from Yunnan in China, it has creamy-coloured flowers with dark red lip markings. *Cymbidium lowianum* var. *kalawense* occurs from southwest Yunnan to Myanmar, and has green flowers, and a yellow to white lip with pale brown markings.

*Cymbidium lowianum* is a large, cool-growing, lithophytic or epiphytic species. It has been used as a parent in 162 registered hybrids to date and is in the breeding line of many more. It flowers in autumn or winter with timing affected both by previous summer conditions and light levels. The dramatic shape of the flower is quite unlike that of a modern hybrid and blooms are produced on long, arching stems.

It grows best with day temperatures of about 16°C and nights around 10°C, although it can survive and bloom outside this temperature range. Light levels should always be good but direct sun must be avoided. Water well when the compost is almost dry and allow to drain. Provide good humidity and air movement, and feed regularly. Repot after flowering when pot bound, about every second year. It will benefit from being placed outside in a sheltered, shady spot in summer, but this may be difficult with larger plants. Whether the plant is inside or out, try to ensure a good temperature differential from day to night to aid flowerstem initiation.
Prosthechea cochleata

This medium-sized epiphyte has ovoid to oblong pseudobulbs and non-resupinate flowers. It is found in forests in south Florida, the Caribbean, and Mexico to northern South America, growing at 100m to 2000m. It was described by Linnaeus in 1763 as Epidendrum cochleatum, transferred to Encyclia in 1935, and then to Prosthechea in 1997 (publ. 1998).

Prosthechea cochleata is the national flower of Belize where it is known as the black orchid. As in other species of Prosthechea, the labellum forms a hood over the column, giving rise to other common names such as cockle-shell or clamshell orchid. The dangling petals and sepals have a resemblance to a sea creature, best summed up in the name sometimes seen on labels, Octopussy. Each flowerstem carries several blooms that open successively, usually two or three at a time, giving a long flowering period. This species generally blooms in the spring but mature plants may flower for most of the year. When small this plant will sit happily on a windowsill, as long as it is not in direct sun.

Provide temperatures around 10°C during the day with nights not below 5°C. Let the plant almost dry out between thorough waterings. It will need less water when it is not in active growth. Fertilize regularly and if the atmosphere is on the dry side, a gentle misting early in the morning is useful. Repot every other year when not in flower, preferably in spring, into a standard, epiphytic-orchid mix. The young buds are attractive to mealy bug so make sure your plants are clean.

Dendrobium kingianum

An Australian native (New South Wales and Queensland), D. kingianum was discovered by Bidwill and described in Edward’s Botanical Register in 1844. The same year plants were sent to Europe and this species has been widely grown ever since. Dendrobium kingianum is a variable species. In early spring its cane-like stems produce sprays of long-lasting, lightly fragrant, small blooms in white, or shades of pink, purple or mauve. Each raceme carries up to 15 flowers. Divisions are often found for sale at local orchid society meetings. It is a good plant to share and a very tolerant one for beginners.

It grows best in an open medium, with plenty of light, fresh air and good humidity. Summer day temperatures of 18°C to 25°C, and nights not below 12°C are best for this species. A cooler rest period of around 8°C for three or four weeks in the winter with nights around 5°C will encourage flowering. In spring and summer, water when the compost starts to dry out. In winter, reduce the frequency to about once every three weeks. Always allow to drain thoroughly. Occasional misting can help raise humidity levels. Feed regularly when in growth and repost every two to three years, ideally when there is about 5cm of new growth, before flowering. This species produces keikis, which can be detached and potted up when their roots are 2cm or so long. If cared for well, D. kingianum will become a large specimen plant.

Dendrobium Berry

The parents of this grex are Dendrobium kingianum x D. Mini Pearl. It was made and registered by M Oda in 1983. This delightful hybrid is both easy to grow and suitable as a houseplant. It is regularly available from orchid nurseries and can be found during its flowering period in local supermarkets and large DIY stores. It produces sprays of long-lasting flowers in deep mauve from its cane-like stems. Unlike its parent D. kingianum it stays a fairly compact plant.

Although best grown with day temperatures of 18 to 25°C and nights not below 12°C, this is a tolerant plant which can survive much higher temperatures as long as humidity and air movement are increased. Good light levels are essential. When grown as a houseplant, an east- or west-facing window, or even a lightly shaded south-facing windowsill is fine. Water freely while the plant is in growth and reduce the frequency as days shorten and temperatures rise.

Provide temperatures around 20°C during the day with nights not below 15°C. Let the plant almost dry out between thorough waterings. It will need less water when it is not in active growth. Fertilize regularly and if the atmosphere is on the dry side, a gentle misting early in the morning is useful. Repot every other year when not in flower, preferably in spring, into a standard, epiphytic-orchid mix. The young buds are attractive to mealy bug so make sure your plants are clean.
temperatures drop. A brief watering every three weeks should be sufficient in winter. A weekly misting in summer is beneficial. Fertilize regularly and repot every two or three years, using a bark mix, when new growths appear.

**Ludisia discolor**

Native from southern China, to Sumatra and the Philippines. *Ludisia discolor* was first described in 1818 by the English botanist John Bellenden Ker Gawler, in the *Botanical Register*, as *Goodyera discolor*. In 1825 it was transferred to the genus *Ludisia* by Achille Richard. Commonly referred to as a jewel orchid, this species is one of a small group grown for their beautiful leaves rather than for their flowers. Other jewel orchids include *Mandrag+Amoertochrus*. *Ludisia discolor* has dark, velvety leaves often with pink undersides, highlighted with contrasting veins. There is considerable variation in leaf colour, from green, to brown, to almost black, and particularly in the amount of veining, its pattern and colour. A variant with white veins is sometimes sold as 'Silver Velvet'.

In the wild *Ludisia discolor* is terrestrial, growing in damp places on forest floors. In cultivation it can tolerate day temperatures between 20 and 28°C, and needs a minimum night time temperature around 16°C. Grow it in an airy position and with good humidity. It can be grown in a shallow pan or pot, or in a terrarium, and placed in a north-facing window. *Ludisia discolor* can tolerate low light levels – direct sunlight would bleach out the colourful leaves and should be avoided. It can be grown in a basic houseplant compost, one recommended for African violets would be ideal, or in a mix of medium to coarse bark and a little sphagnum moss. Allow the compost to almost dry out between waterings and feed regularly. Small ivory blooms appear on upright flower stems in winter. Flowering lasts about two to four weeks. The flower stems should be cut back when the blooms die. As the plant grows and spreads, the fleshy stems occasionally break off. Plant the ‘cutting’ in a small pot of sphagnum moss and water it thoroughly. Leave in a shady, warm place making sure that the sphagnum remains moist. Roots should start to develop in about six weeks and the cutting can be potted up after six months.

**Paphiopedilum Clair de Lune**

The parents of this grex are *Paphiopedilum emerald* × *P. Alma Gevaert*. It was made and registered by the nursery Sanders of St. Albans in 1927. This large-flowered, apple-green and white hybrid remains a popular plant, and is considered by many to be one of the best Maudiae-type *Paphiopedilum* hybrids of this colour. Its flowers are larger than those of *P. Maudiae* (*P. callosum* × *P. lawrenceanum*), an earlier grex dating from 1900. The clone ‘Edgard Van Belle’ has particularly large flowers and has received many awards including an Award of Merit from the RHS in 1935. Large specimens of *P. Clair de Lune* have been known to produce more than 20 flowers, but it is generally available as a young plant with one or two growths. Flowering is usually in spring. A single bloom of about 10cm across is held on a stiff, upright stem, which makes it popular with flower arrangers too.

*Paphiopedilum Clair de Lune* grows best in a warm to intermediate greenhouse or in the home, in temperatures of about 21°C in the day, with nights not below 18°C. Indirect sunlight is ideal. Keep the growing medium moist but not sodden, and feed regularly. It can be grown in a bark and sphagnum mix, which should be changed yearly, preferably in spring after flowering, as the sphagnum breaks down readily.

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