

Dendrobium speciosum and Me

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Dendrobium speciosum. Perhaps the most overlooked orchid in the world today. Whether it be in a mango tree in a suburban back-yard or on rock-face on a mountain range, a specimen plant in full flower is unsurpassed. If this eye-catching, spectacular orchid grew in America it would possibly be the most popular orchid in the world today.

Nomenclature

Like a number of orchids, *Dendrobium speciosum* has had many naming reviews by Taxonomists. Let me walk you through the most recent.

A. Dockrill – Australian Indigenous Orchids 1969 (varietal status – 5)

Dendrobium speciosum var. *speciosum*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *hillii*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *grandiflorum*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *curvicaule*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *nitidum*

S. Clemesha – Orchadian March 1981 (amended varietal status - 5)

Dendrobium speciosum var. *pedunculatum*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *nitidum* = *Dendrobium x gracillimum*

S. Clemesha – Orchadian September 1982 (varietal status – 6)

Dendrobium speciosum var. *capricornicum*

M. Clements and D. Jones - Australian Orchid Research 1989 (species status – 5)

Dendrobium speciosum var. *speciosum* = *Dendrobium speciosum*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *hillii* = *Dendrobium tarberi*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *grandiflorum* = *Dendrobium rex*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *curvicaule* = *Dendrobium curvicaule*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *pedunculatum* = *Dendrobium pedunculatum*
Dendrobium speciosum var. *capricornicum* = *Dendrobium curvicaule*

D. Banks and S. Clemesha – Australian Orchid Review 1990

(subspecies status - 1 species 5 subspecies)
Dendrobium speciosum subspecies *hillii*
Dendrobium speciosum subspecies *grandiflorum*
Dendrobium speciosum subspecies *curvicaule*
Dendrobium speciosum subspecies *pedunculatum*
Dendrobium speciosum subspecies *capricornicum*

P. Adams – Orchadian 1992 (varietal status- 6)

That's where we are at now!!

I am glad I was able to clear that up for you.

HOWEVER, WATCH THIS SPACE !!! IT AIN'T FINISHED YET !!!!! (*Thelyphyton*)

Before I talk about the locations and descriptions of the plants let me throw in a disclaimer that nothing is absolute in nature so there will always be an exception to the norm or should it be called evolution. Also unlike the song I have not been everywhere.

This species grows on the East Coast of Australia from North Queensland to just below the NSW – Victorian border. It grows at a wide range of elevations down to sea level and both as a lithophyte (on rocks) and an epiphyte (on trees).

Let me now talk about each variety starting at the top geographically speaking. (I always like to start at the top, its easier that way, it saves a lot of uphill struggle.)

Dendrobium speciosum var. pedunculatum

This variety grows on the Windsor Tableland from the Palmer River south to the upper reaches of the Burdekin River mainly at elevation on the inland side of the range in drier forest types mainly on rocks in very bright conditions, often full sunlight. The canes are normally very short from 5 to 30 cm with flowers on the upper half of tall upright peduncles. The flowers are normally 20 to 25mm in diameter, widely open, chunky segments, white to cream.

Dendrobium speciosum var. curvicaule

This variety grows from south of Cooktown (Mt. Amos) south to Mackay. Having said that I have difficulty grouping the form that grows from south of Cooktown to Tully with the form that grows from Mt Spec north of Townsville to Mackay. The northern-most form normally grows on rocks at medium to high altitudes in exposed locations, has short compact canes, normally curved, up to 300mm high, flowers 35 – 40mm in diameter, white to cream on short to medium racemes up to 40cm. The southern-most form grows on trees and rocks down to low altitudes, has robust canes up to 800mm, flowers up to 60mm in diameter, white to cream, occasionally gold, on racemes up to 800mm, commencing at the base of the rachis, frequently crowded.

Dendrobium speciosum var. capricornicum

This variety is confined to the areas around the Tropic of Capricorn from coastal Rockhampton, (Byfield, Yeppoon) to the Blackdown Tableland and Carnarvon Gorge. It grows on sandstone rock faces or volcanic plugs at low to medium altitude in drier forest types in very bright conditions. Again I have difficulty grouping the coastal forms with the Blackdown Tableland and Carnarvon forms. The coastal forms normally have canes up to 200mm tall, slender, with small leaves in proportion to the cane, flowers approx 25mm diameter, white to cream on short to medium racemes. The inland form has short thick canes with proportionate leaves up to 250mm tall, normally curved, invariably deep red to purple when new, flowers approx 45mm diameter yellow occasionally white to cream on curved racemes, frequently crowded.

Dendrobium speciosum var. grandiflorum

Everything about this variety is grand, grand canes and leaves and grand flowers. This variety grows mainly in high altitude rainforest on rocks and trees from Gladstone to Jimna north of Brisbane. It has canes up to 900mm tall by 40mm wide, large leaves up to 300mm, and sometimes erect aerial roots, flowers up to 100mm tall, cream to golden yellow almost never white on curved racemes up to 900mm long.

Dendrobium speciosum var. hillii

This variety grows mainly in high altitude rainforest on rocks and on trees from Nambour to Bulahdelah north of Newcastle mainly in high altitude rainforest mainly on trees and also on rocks. It has canes up to 1 metre tall, slim and straight with large leaves up to 300mm, frequently erect aerial roots, flowers oval up to 35mm tall on long stems (pedicels), slender proportions, white to cream almost never yellow, on curved racemes up to 600mm long normally crowded.

Dendrobium speciosum var. speciosum

This variety grows almost solely on rocks at a variety of altitudes from sea level upwards from Bulahdelah to south of the NSW – Victorian border. It has extremely robust canes up to 500mm tall by 60mm thick normally curved, flowers up to 75mm tall, wide proportions, white through cream to yellow, normally well spaced on upright to curved racemes up to 600mm long

Conclusion

So please consider that this information may help you in identifying the different varieties of *Dendrobium speciosum* and the type that you might wish to grow in your shade house or in your garden. Unfortunately commercial nurseries like me try to improve on nature and “hybridise” the different varieties and make it very difficult to identify the plant without reference to the nametag.

But we can't stuff up the magnificence of the spectacle and perfume of a flowering specimen of *Dendrobium speciosum*, the most prominent of all Australian Native Orchids.

Thank you for listening.

Ross Harvey

*From Talk given by Ross Harvey at STOCQ conference at Caboolture, Qld Australia in June 2001.
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