

Cypripediums

By **NOLLIE CILLIERS & TINUS OBERHOLZER**
Plantae Orchids, Boscia, Kleinfontein, Brits 0250.
E-mail: info@plantae.co.za Website: www.plantae.co.za
Photography by **NOLLIE CILLIERS**

Slipper orchids have an allure of their own and have a unique following in the orchid growing community.

This group is also one of our favourites, but we were always told, while drooling over their pictures in books and on the internet, that cypripediums are “impossible”. Having grown three of the five genera that make up the slipper orchids, one cannot help but try at least once to grow cypripediums.

In 2004 two plants of *Cypripedium acaule* and a *Cyp. Giselle* were obtained from a nursery in the USA. After reading everything that was available on them even before the purchase, and heeding all the warnings about the difficulty in growing *Cyp. acaule* by expert growers, nothing could deter us from trying them. Needless to say none of the plants appeared after a few months' vernalization in the fridge. Taping the drainage holes shut might have prevented them from disappearing from the pot as Mike Rakow always jokes regarding what happens to any prized slipper orchid eventually.

In April 2010 we were tempted again by an offering by Judith Prins Tuinorchideeën in Holland of cypripediums and other temperate growing orchids. We ordered a few plants, including three *Cyp. reginae*, which all arrived in fairly good condition considering their delicate leaves. One of these single-growth plants even produced a beautiful flower, with slight uneven colouration on the pouch, and was also shown to the judges of the Highveld Judging region. The flower lasted for about two to three weeks and the leaves dried after about three months. One plant was sold to Casper van Zyl from ONT who has a passion for terrestrial orchids.



Cypripedium kentuckiense.

The dormant plants were put in the fridge during the early summer of 2010/11 for about four months. They were then put in the coolest part of the greenhouse, right in front of the wet wall. The root mass looked nice and plump and had several dormant ‘eyes’ or ‘buds’ on them. Within a short period these developed into healthy looking plants. On one of the plants a flower bud was emerging, but at the same time small black patches were noticed on the leaves. In both plants these marks quickly spread to the stem and within a few days the plants collapsed. After emptying the pots the roots were also soggy. At least this time we managed to get them to come up again. Casper



Cypripedium reginae.

had a similar experience with his plant which, unfortunately, also got 'the rot' and died.

Last year Casper asked if we were going to import cypripediums again and we saw a new offering from Anthura B.V., a Dutch company renowned for *Phalaenopsis* production, at a much reduced price. Anthura B.V. produces thousands of temperate growing orchids and markets them under the "Garden Orchid" slogan. This time we not only got *Cyp. reginae*, but also *Cyp. parviflorum*, *Cyp. parviflorum* var. *pubescens* and *Cyp. kentuckiense*. The *Cyp. reginae* and *Cyp. kentuckiense* plants arrived dormant and within a few days green buds appeared which grew rapidly into very sturdy multi-growth plants. They were kept as cool as possible and two plants were in perfect condition for the ONT show where they were exhibited and not only were they popular with the public, but the judges concurred and both plants were awarded (see comparison with other awards). The accolades must, however, go to Anthura for producing

these healthy plants. At the same show G&S Orchids of Pretoria sold several cypripediums, mostly hybrids, also originating from the Netherlands. It would be interesting to know how those growers found growing them.

This time round we left both plants in front of the wet wall during summer and kept them slightly moist.

At the time of writing this article *Cyp. reginae* 'Diamond Jubilee' AM/SAOC has produced several new buds that have started to sprout again. Hopefully this time round we will have another stunning display of flowers.

Cypripediums have very short rhizomes from which the stems appear and a mass of fibrous roots. These are about 2 mm in diameter and are fairly pliable and quite unlike the roots of *Bonatea speciosa* for instance. They are also not fleshy or tuberous, but the root mass just increases every year as the plant matures. This root-ball, with its dormant 'eyes', is potted in a free draining medium consisting of three quarters



Cypripedium reginae: plant.



Cypripedium reginae: a different cultivar.



Cypripedium reginae: new growths emerging.



Cypripedium parviflorum.

fine gravel and the rest a mixture of fine bark, leaf mould and a bit of peat. The plants grow extremely fast and are mature three to four weeks after the new stems appear above the soil. The flower or flowers are produced shortly thereafter atop the inflorescence above the delicately downy, plicate leaves. We kept the plants in the greenhouse in a very bright position. Growing them outside where they can get 2-3 hours of direct morning sun might be even better. They should be kept damp and never dry out completely. Fertilizing with a weak solution of a balanced fertilizer would also be beneficial.

(A very good video demonstrating how to repot cypripediums can be found at the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=HVQZpDLLPqY)

The problems we experienced were probably due to our hot, dry climate and we suggest that these plants be grown under northern hemisphere seasons, i.e. in active growth from April to September and putting them in the fridge for the remainder. As orchid growers we quickly perceive something is difficult to grow because in our greenhouse we cannot provide the right conditions. Do not start with a negative approach when you try to grow something new, nor be

influenced by other people. Sometimes that is half the battle won, but be sure that you can give the plants the conditions that they require. The best time to get hold of these plants from Europe is in February/March when they are still dormant and we are willing to assist anyone interested in acquiring some plants.

Cypripediums are now much more freely available than a few years back and everyone should grasp the opportunity when one gets the chance to grow one of these extraordinary orchids; you won't be disappointed. *

Bibliography:

- Bronstein H. 2012. *AQ Plus version 4.7*, American Orchid Society, USA.
- Griffiths M., 1995. *Manual of Orchids*. Macmillan Reference Books, London, England.
- Williams B., et al. 1987. *Orchids for Everyone*. Hamlyn Publishing, Twickenham, England.

For further information on cold growing orchids we would recommend the following websites:

- <http://www.judithprinstuinorchidee.nl>
- <http://www.gardenorchid.com>
- <http://www.phytisia.com>
(Another Dutch company producing several cold growing genera).

Cypripedium reginae

Cultivar name, Year awarded	Flowers + Buds	Inflores- cences	Natural spread (in mm, WxL)	Dorsal Sepal (in mm, WxL)	Petals (in mm, WxL)	Lip/ Pouch (in mm, WxL)
'Diamond Jubilee' AM/SAOC, 2012	2	1	80x55	27x39	11x41	30x40
'Cotton Candy' AM/AOS, 2007	7	5	74x79	32x39	15x38	34x44
'Prince Alice of Greece' CHM/AOS, 2007	4	4	71x78	25x30	13x35	30x35

Cypripedium kentuckiense

Cultivar name, Year awarded	Flowers + Buds	Inflores- cences	Natural spread (in mm, WxL)	Dorsal Sepal (in mm, WxL)	Petals (in mm, WxL)	Lip/ Pouch (in mm, WxL)
'Boscia Tessa' AM/SAOC, 2012	2	2	86x98	39x59	10x78	32x66
'Briar Hoppers' AM/AOS, 2009	4+1	5	75x140	30x70	7x90	25x60
'Sunset Valley Orchids' CCM/AOS, 2003	9	9	100x90	39x64	9x79	45x60
'Trident' AM/AOS, 2001	3	2	95x108	42x84	11x101	28x61



Cypripedium parviflorum var. *pubescens*.