

Orchid Olympics - Seedling Competition 2020

Congratulations on participating in an ESOS Seedling Competition! This has been made possible with our increased windfall from SOS. The competition involves growing a Slipper Orchid (*Paphiopedilum*) seedling to flowering. The first to flower wins. These plants were selected as the subjects as there are very few of these striking and attractive plants within the Society. Here are the rules:

1. Sign up by paying \$10 at the February meeting to receive a numbered seedling of the slipper orchid, *Paphiopedilum* William Ambler (this price is subsidised by ESOS).
2. Grow it at home the best way you can (see growing advice below). You need patience!
3. Bring your plant to an ESOS monthly meeting every 4 months for comparison with other competitors (and advice). You will be reminded in the ESOS Bulletin to bring it along.
4. The best six plants will be awarded points (First = 6, Second = 5, Third = 4 points, Fourth = 3 points etc).
5. The plant will be judged every 4 months on general appearance, size of the largest leaf, and finally the flowers.
6. If you forget to bring your plant to be judged at a meeting, you will earn no points.
7. The winner will be awarded a prize at the ESOS Christmas Party in December. Runners up will be based on points.
8. If the orchid dies, you are eliminated from the competition, and no further discussion will be entered into.
9. Good luck growing this beautiful orchid!

How to Grow *Paphiopedilums* (Slipper Orchids)

It is nearly 200 years since the first "slipper" orchids or *Paphiopedilums* were discovered and brought to England. This species, *Paphiopedilum venustum* is still in common cultivation today. As in many parts of the world, the native habitat of many species is under severe threat or has already been destroyed, leaving only the cultivated plants as surviving examples of their species. Multifloral *Paphiopedilums* need conditions similar to *Phalaenopsis* orchids.

Paphiopedilum William Ambler is a primary hybrid between *Paph rothschildianum* (named after its discoverer Rothschild) and *Paph wilhelminiae* (named after Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands). It is one of the really striking multifloral *Paphiopedilum* hybrids, and was first registered in 2001 by Fox Valley Orchids USA.

- *Paph rothschildianum* is from Borneo and tropical growing.
- *Paph wilhelminiae* is from New Guinea and is intermediate growing (to 550m)



- It will flower regularly from December to February each year, producing a 30-50cm inflorescence with 3-5 flowers. Flowers last 2 to 3 months and are very dark, with well-defined markings.
- *Paphiopedilums* in general prefer less light and certainly no direct sunlight which may burn the leaves. You can tell by the leaves if the plant is getting too much light. A reddish tinge on the edges means you need to provide more shade for your plant. You can grow it under 70% shade cloth in a protected position.
- Sydney's temperate conditions suit the majority of *Paphiopedilums*. This group does not like being outside in winter, so take them inside in the colder months, when minimum night temperatures go below 12°C.
- They require a little more moisture than many other orchids. They have no pseudobulbs to store water, so if you water every 3 to 5 days, it is usually sufficient. They appreciate humidity, and around 50 - 70 % is good. Never let it fall below 25%. Standing them on a tray of damp stones, as we do for *Phalaenopsis*, will improve their condition. Water regularly all year with special attention in summer.
- The potting mix needs to drain well but hold some moisture. Several specialist mixes have been devised and are available through societies. A mixture of bark and perlite is satisfactory for the majority of this genus, but your favourite 'slipper mix' will be fine. They prefer to be in a smaller pot. (Gary grows his plant in Sydney, in a mix of medium bark (60%) perlite (20%) charcoal (10%) and shell grit (10%) in a cold glasshouse under 70% shade cloth all year).
- They require good ventilation as do all orchids. Do not leave any water sitting in the crown of the leaves to avoid rot. Dab it out with a tissue.
- Every month, flush out any accumulated salts from the pot using clear water for a good ten seconds, as roots are sensitive to salt build up.
- Gary fertilises every time he waters, with a weak solution of Peters Cal Mg Grower. This has added calcium and magnesium. Any fertiliser is OK as long as high nitrogen is used until it reaches flowering size.



- Multi-floral *Paphiopedilums* are the largest members of the Paph family. They require a bit more space, but the spectacular display of flowers they provide makes them worth it!
- **Finally, if you are really interested in winning, why not attend a Paphiopedilum Orchid Society meeting? They meet on the third Wednesday of every month at 7.30pm at the Ermington Community Community Hall, River Road, Ermington. All visitors are welcome. Renowned expert Seong Tay will talk about Paphiopedilums on 19 February and 18 March.**

(With thanks to Gary Hart and Chris Dalrymple for contributing their useful advice)