

D & B ORCHIDS  
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## **The Elegant Lady's Slipper Orchids**

Of all the orchids in the world, the elegant Lady's Slipper is easy to grow, but is little known in the horticulture industry. As orchid growing becomes a more popular plant hobby, orchid fanciers want more and more exotic orchids. The Lady's Slipper is a good selection for home orchid growers. The slipper orchids flower throughout the year, have compact attractive foliage, and the plants require low light to grow and flower. This diverse group of orchids is perfect to grow indoors or in a shade greenhouse.

Phalaenopsis, Dendrobium, Cymbidium and Oncidium orchids are easy to find in many local nurseries and garden centers, because these orchids are easy to grow, affordable and very showy. The exotic Lady's Slipper orchids has been neglected because they are a little more expensive and not mass produced by tissue culture. Slipper orchids are propagated by division or micro-propagation from seed.

The Lady's Slipper orchids are distinctive from other orchid genera by a colorful waxen flower with a pouched lip resembling the toe of a slipper, a upright dorsal sepal resembling the heel of the slipper, two anthers and a fused ventral sepal. The pouch serves as a trap to guide insect pollinators to the two anthers and stigma. The anthers and stigma are protected by a hard waxy colorful structure called the staminode. The staminode is very distinct with a great deal of character which helps identify the species and hybrids. Orchids usually have one dorsal and two lateral sepals. On the slipper orchid flowers, the two lateral sepals are fused into one ventral sepal above the pouched petal or lip. The slipper flowers size range from dainty 2 inch flowers to large waxen 6 inch flowers. Flower color range from white to an almost black purple. The lateral petals may have colorful strips, wart looking blotches and eyelash hairs. The plants have very attractive light green, dark green or mottled foliage. A very short rhizome gives rise to symmetrical fan-like growth. The leaves are two ranked folded lengthwise with parallel veins. Many orchids do not have attractive foliage. The Lady's Slipper orchid plants are attractive plants even when not in flower.

The Lady's Slipper orchids are separated from other orchids into the subfamily Diandreae which have two fertile anthers. All other orchids have one fertile anther

and are in the subfamily Monandreae. Diandrae is divided into four genera: Cypripedium, Paphiopedilum, Phragmipedium and Selenipedium.

The Cypripedium slipper orchids are native to temperate zones of North America, Europe and Asia. The state flower of Minnesota is Cypripedium reginae. Paphiopedilum slipper orchids are from southeast tropical Asia. Phragmipedium slipper orchids are from tropical South America. Selenipedium slipper orchids are from Central America.

Lady's Slipper orchids are terrestrial as apposed to the many epiphytic tropical orchids. The slippers grow in low light in leaf litter and compost along creeks, in meadows, on rocks and on the forest floor where the sun breaks through the forest canopy. I recommend slipper orchids because these orchids will thrive and flower in the low light of most homes on a east windowsill and with some shade on a south window and tolerate the temperatures of the normal home. Lady's Slipper orchids are a diverse group in flower size, color, shape and foliage. There are slippers in flower throughout the year. The flowers last for one to three months, depending if the orchid flowers with a single flower per stem or with multiple flowers per stem.