

Aerides lawrenceae

By Martin Motes

Fragrant Long-Lasting Flowers for Autumn

FEW ORCHIDS ARE AS ELEGANTLY beautiful as a well-flowered specimen of *Aerides lawrenceae*. Cascades of rose-tipped white flowers delight the eye from a distance. Closer inspection reveals pearly white, waxy sepals and petals tipped with deep rose and a deep rose-colored lip, providing a perfectly inflected contrast to the predominantly white flower. Well-grown plants can produce six 24-inch- (60-cm-) long spikes of these delightful, full-formed flowers. Close inspection also envelops the observer in the delicious fragrance that almost surpasses its aptly named relative *Aerides odorata*. In the best forms the flowers are up to 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches (4.5 cm), rivaling *Aerides crispa* as the largest in the genus. Like the perfect diva, she also times her arrival on the stage perfectly: *Aer. lawrenceae* appears in the autumn when few other Aeridinae species are in bloom.



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One of a group of *Aerides* species from the Southern Hemisphere with similar plant habits, inflorescences and flowering times, *Aer. lawrenceae* is most closely related to *Aerides quinquevulnera* and somewhat more distantly to *Aerides leeana*. *Aerides lawrenceae* is the southernmost of these, coming from Mindanao, Philippines. James Veitch (1887–1894) states “It is often associated with *Vanda Sanderiana* (sic) and *Phalaenopsis Sanderiana* (sic) and these three noble orchids have even been observed growing on the same tree.” Gustav Reichenbach described *Aer. lawrenceae* (1833), naming it in honor of Lady Lawrence, the wife of the then-president of the Royal Horticultural Society. Carl Roebelin discovered *Aer. lawrenceae* while in pursuit of the “red” *Phalaenopsis sanderiana*. His first glimpse of both is dramatically described by Fredrick Boyle:

“As they neared the surf, the whole body of islanders rushed toward them ... dived beneath the wave, and came up at the vessel’s side. ... But the first yellow head popped up just where Roebelin was seated. Among the feathers twisted in it, draggled now, he saw a spray, surely an *Aerides*! But bluish-red, unlike any spe-



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cies known. ... Another shot up; another. Among the flowers with which every head was decked, Roebelin saw many *Phalaenopsis*. And most of them were ruddy” (Swinson 1970).

[1] *Aerides lawrenceae* ‘Mary Jen’, AM/AOS, with perfectly arranged cascades of flowers that characterize the species at its best. Grower: Tom Coffey.



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CULTURE As one might imagine from Veitch's quote, *Aer. lawrenceae* shares aspects of its culture with both vandas and phalaenopsis. Definitely a warm grower, *Aer. lawrenceae* does best if not subjected to temperatures below 50 F (10 C) for too long. Like vandas, this plant needs abundant and frequent watering, but must be grown in a basket or pot that allows free drainage and rapid drying: she is a daughter of the air. Bare baskets or pots are usually the best support but large chunks of wood, horticultural charcoal or bark are sometimes helpful in environments where rapid drying occurs. *Aerides lawrenceae* needs high light but its broad leaves (totally opposite in architecture from those of *Euanthe*¹ *sanderiana*) indicate it is best pleased with light levels closer to those favored by phalaenopsis. This species roots robustly and is exceptionally easy to grow. Plants quickly develop into specimens and in relatively frost-free areas are superlative subjects for naturalizing in trees or on stone walls. In temperate greenhouses, these plants are among the most amenable of the Aeridinae and are highly recommended as beginner's plants for growers new to vandas and their relatives.

HYBRIDS The full-formed shape and exquisite color pattern of *Aer. lawrenceae*, as well as its inherent plant vigor, commend the species to the orchid hybridist.

Aerides Hermon Slade (*lawrenceae* × *rosea*), a robust primary hybrid, is famous for its ability to form spectacular specimen plants in tropical patios and shade houses. Also of great value in hybridizing is the flowering season of *Aer. lawrenceae*. Like *Eua. sanderiana*, the most successful of



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Aeridinae species in producing hybrids, *Aer. lawrenceae* is a short-day, autumn-blooming species. Not only does this encourage its progeny to flower strongly in the desirable holiday season but, like *Eua. sanderiana*, it produces hybrids with spring-blooming, long-day species that flower freely all year. Crossed to *Eua. sanderiana*, it produces the highly successful *Aeridovanda* Tsuruku Iwasaki with delicately spotted pale flowers. *Aeridovanda* Hollyhock (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *V. Rothschildiana*) demonstrates the propensity of *Aer. lawrenceae* to suppress color and yield opalescent pastels in its progeny. Both of the hybrids also illustrate the negative results from crossing *Aer. lawrenceae* with large plants such as *Eua. sanderiana* or tall plants such as *Vanda coerulea* or its hybrids: plants too large for comfort in most temperate greenhouses. A more successful early

[2] *Aerides lawrenceae* 'Elizabeth', AM/AOS, illustrating the full-formed flowers with distinct markings typical for the species. Grower: Jean Wilson.

[3] Vivid markings on the sepals and petals of *Aerides quinquevulnera* give the species its epithet meaning "five wounds." The clone 'Bischoff's Grape Wine', AM/AOS, is shown. Grower: Carla Bischoff.

[4] The deep rose flowers of *Aerides leeana* presented on arching sprays make an impressive display on a compact plant.

[5] *Aerides odorata*, like *Aer. lawrenceae*, can be beautiful fragrant additions to tropical or subtropical gardens.

line of breeding was *Aeridovanda* Henry Furumizo (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *V. Stuart Furumizo*), which has *Vanda cristata* in its background. *Aeridovanda* Henry Furumizo produced more-manageable plants and accentuated the contrast of lip to sepal and petal color, which *Aer. lawrenceae* confers on its offspring. *Aeridovanda* Kinnaree (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *V. denisoniana*) produced equally fine results; the pale yellow flowers are delicately tinged with lilac and are superbly fragrant of lemon. In addition to the bonus of fragrance, breeding the fragrant *Aer. lawrenceae* to compact fragrant spring-blooming *Vanda* species produces smaller plants that reward the grower with several blooms a year.

While crossing *Aer. lawrenceae* to more diminutive *Vanda* species is an excellent strategy, crossing it to ascocendas

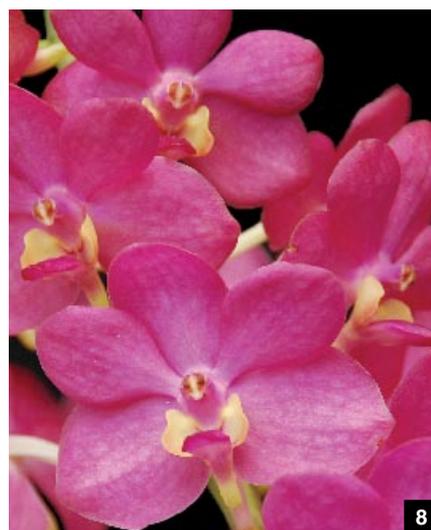
¹Formerly *Vanda*.



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is a more surefire way to produce smaller plants. An unexpected bonus in these lines of breeding is the amazing range of color in the progeny that emerges when a primary or near primary *Ascocenda* hybrid is used. *Christieara* Ruth Murai (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *Ascda.* Yip Sum Wah) amply illustrated this kaleidoscopic range of color early on. Colors in this grex range from near white tipped with rose, reminiscent of the *Aer. lawrenceae* parent, through a rainbow of colors from pale pink to deep rose to nearly red and even orange. The combination of the petal from *Ascocentrum curvifolium* (imparted by the *Ascda.* Yip Sum Wah parent) with the full shape of *Aer. lawrenceae* consistently yields award-winning form in these lines of breeding. The waxy, pearllike texture of *Aer. lawrenceae* comes through in most individual clones, making them shine all the brighter. Other successful christiearas, such as *Christieara* Memoria Lillian Arnold (× *Ascda.* Meda Arnold), *Christieara* René Gerber (× *Ascda.* Bonanza) and *Christieara* Robsan (× *Ascda.* Tan Chai Beng), reveal similar enchanting

diversity. Such compact, free-flowering plants are an excellent way of introducing the best qualities of *Aer. lawrenceae* to even the smallest collection, but if one has the space for a large draught, *Aer. lawrenceae* is always lovely taken neat.

References

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 Veitch, J. 1887-94. *A Manual of Orchidaceous Plants*. Volume 2. James Veitch & Sons, Chelsea.

Martin Motes, PhD, has bred hundreds of new hybrids and received scores of American Orchid Society awards, including three FCCs and four Awards of Quality. His hybrids garnered gold, silver and bronze medals at the 18th World Orchid Conference in Dijon, France, where Vanda Mary Motes (Blue Grig × tessellata) won the trophy for Best Vanda in Show. He is an accredited AOS judge and author of three books and numerous articles. Motes, in collaboration with David Roberts, PhD, and Lauren Gardiner,

- [6] The color pattern of *Aer. lawrenceae* is subtly discernable in the delicately colored flowers of *Christieara* René Gerber 'Leilane', AM/AOS (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *Ascda.* Bonanza). Grower: Ernest Jolin.
- [7] *Christieara* Memoria Lillian Arnold 'Jan Kadet', AM/AOS (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *Ascda.* Meda Arnold) offers subtle color patterns, yet another variation on a theme. Grower: Tom Coffey.
- [8] Rich pastel colors and opalescent texture emerge from *Aer. lawrenceae* hybrids, among them *Christieara* Ruth Murai 'Memoria David Leach', AM/AOS (*Aer. lawrenceae* × *Ascda.* Yip Sum Wah). Grower: Michael Birkett.

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