

Our speaker for this month was Bill Nunez from Seminole, FL. Bill grew up in Florida on 1,800 acres of family owned cattle ranch land. During his youth he began working the local cattle ranches and became acquainted with Florida's cypress swamps. It was in these swamps that he became familiar with many of Florida's orchid species along with native ferns and various species of wildlife. It is clear in listening to Bill speak how much he greatly enjoyed those adventures into the wooded swamps. They became his refuge. Entering into those untouched woods left him with a sense of traveling back in time hundreds of years, a sense of old Florida. He first began growing orchids in the 1960's after receiving some back bulbs from some of his father's friends who had greenhouses and also grew orchids. He has a real passion for growing and creating new orchid hybrids within the *Cattleya* alliance. Today he gave a discussion on *Encyclia tampensis* and other *Encyclia* species and their hybrids.

The genus *Encyclia* (pronounced en-SIK-lee-ah) includes 150 species and several natural hybrids that are distributed throughout Mexico, Florida, the Caribbean, and parts of South America. The name *Encyclia* was derived from the Greek word *enkykleomai*, meaning to encircle, referring to how the lateral side lobes of the lip curve upward encircling the column. Characteristics that are common to all *Encyclia* orchids include a spring-hinged lip that is attached to the column, a lip that is spade shaped with a coloration that will vary from that of the petals, and a spray of blooms on an upright, arching inflorescence. The members of this genus are epiphytic with the exception of *Encyclia gracilis*, which grows on rocks or as a terrestrial among leaf detritus in coastal habitats.

Out of all the *Encyclia* species the one that has captivated Bill's heart is *Encyclia tampensis*, or the Florida butterfly orchid. This species is a common epiphytic orchid that is distributed throughout central and southern Florida, Cuba and the Bahamas. This orchid species was first collected near Tampa Bay, hence the name. This orchid species is especially abundant along waterways and thrives in humid swampy forests and hammock habitats. The flowers are highly variable in both size and color. The typical presentation is flowers with sepals and petals that are a yellow-green suffused with varying amounts of brown or purple. The lip of the orchid is white with a distinctive purple or magenta spot located in the center of the lip. Although this species may bloom sporadically throughout the year, the typical bloom period is from May-August with the peak being in June. If you feel adventurous and would like to head out into Florida's swamps, Myakka River State Park near Sarasota, FL is a good location to view this orchid in bloom in its native habitat. In my experience, the peak time for blooming for that area seems to be the end of May till about middle of June.

Bill is rather particular about what characteristics he feels best exemplifies the species, and one of his plants, *Encyclia tampensis* 'Batman', is an exceptionally nice example that showcases all of the desired traits. The flower of this orchid has a lip that is flat and round, almost a perfect circle. The lip is a pristine white color and the purple spot on the lip is very pronounced

The floral segments have a nice, round arrangement and the ends of the sepals and petals have a distinctive paddle-like shape. He warns us to be wary of specimens that display flowers with pointed petals as opposed to the paddle or oar shaped ones. Since this characteristic often indicates that there is some other species present in the background and the plant is not a "true" *E. tampensis*. When selecting which plants of the species to breed, he only selects those orchids that possess a flat lip with a nice dark spot. That is what he feels is most distinguishable about the species and helps *E. tampensis* stand out.

Now let's take a look at some orchid hybrids that utilize *Encyclia tampensis*, other species *Encyclias*, and their influence on hybridization. One thing about hybridization is that it is trial and error. You never really know what quality of plants that you are going to end up with. Sometimes things do not always work out as you had hoped, as was the case of a cross created using an alba form of *E. tampensis* and Blc. Little Toshie. Bill informed that the majority of progeny from this cross were a disappointment. There were just a few plants from the entire cross that had pleasing flowers with a large, frilly lip and *Encyclia* influenced flower petals. In addition to the disappointment of the shape of the flowers the overall flower count with this cross was something to be desired. The best plants only developing two blooms per inflorescence. Sometimes in hybridization certain orchids are just too far apart from one another genealogically that the hybrid does not work. The hybrid Cty. El Hatilio (*C. mossiae* v. semi-alba x *E. tampensis*) had such extremely poor overall flower form that Bill mentioned he tossed nearly 600 plants into the dumpster. Every now and then nature will surprise you and give you a result that you were not at all anticipating from crossing two orchids. That is the case of *E. gracilis*, a natural hybrid of *E. corerellii* and *E. fehlingsii*. Both parents in this cross have small side lobes and a less than showy lip, yet the resulting offspring is a flower with a large, flamboyant showy lip and large side lobes. Further use of *E. corerellii* in hybridization has revealed that when this species is utilized as a parent in a cross that it will "puff out" the side lobes and lip of the flowers in its offspring. In breeding orchids it can often take several generations in order to breed out certain traits that are distinctive of a species. For instance, the hybrid *Encyclia* Cashen's Chocolate Rose [*E. Orchid Jungle* (*E. alta* x *E. phoenicea*) x *E. cordigera*] has flowers that display flat and are not claw-shaped, as is characteristic of the species *E. cordigera*. Another example of this is the species *E. plicata*, which is perfectly beautiful in its own right, but not used much in hybridization because it takes many generations of breeding in order to help straighten out the lip. A favorite species of Bill's that he enjoys using in hybridization is *E. randii*. He is partial to the wide lip and chocolate colored sepals and petals that this species will pass along to its progeny. Cty. Brazilian Rubies (*C. tenebrosa* x *E. randii*) is a beautiful hybrid created using this species that has deep chocolate colored sepals and petals and a bright fuchsia-red colored lip. Because of the *Encyclia* parentage the flowers of this hybrid hold and present better with considerably less flopping over. Another species known to pass along desired traits to its offspring is *E. alata*. The presence of *E. alata* in a cross will cause offspring to have striations on the lip and a yellow picotee around the edge of the lip. An example of these characteristics can be observed in the hybrid *Enanthleya* Pixie Charm (*Cattlianthe* Pixie x *E. alata*). Over the years there have been several hybrids made using *E. tampensis* and other *Encyclia* species. Although I am sure it is difficult to single just one hybrid out, a personal favorite of Bill's is Cty. Ken Anderson [*C. Valentine* (*C. loddigesii* x *C. warneri*) x *E. tampensis*]. The flowers of this hybrid are heavily influenced by both *E. tampensis* and *C. loddigesii*. other *Encyclia* species. Although I am sure it is difficult to single just one hybrid out, a personal favorite of Bill's is Cty. Ken Anderson [*C. Valentine* (*C. loddigesii* x *C. warneri*) x *E. tampensis*]. The flowers of this hybrid are heavily influenced by both *E. tampensis* and *C. loddigesii*.

The cultural requirements for *Encyclia* orchids are straight forward and similar to most other species of orchid. Just like with other orchid species they desire good, strong air movement. They prefer brighter light similar to *Cattleyas*, however, care should be taken

to avoid direct midday sun. They will tolerate temperatures that range between 60F and 90F. With this genus it is important to avoid over watering plants as they do not like to sit with wet roots for extended periods of time. They prefer getting their roots wet and being able to dry out quickly. Bill recommends giving plants a “dry period” from November to February. During this time switch to a reduced water regimen, providing water to plants every 7-10 days. These orchids are very tolerant and can be grown both mounted and in pots. However, if planning to grow on mounts Bill suggests not to use any backing material (i.e. sphagnum moss) The moss would keep the root system too wet over an extended period of time. For his potted plants he utilizes an inorganic mixture of charcoal and volcanic rock. Whether growing your plants mounted or in a pot, the best time to re-mount or repot Encyclias is during the spring (March-April) or Fall (September-October) when they undergo their semi-annual growth spurts. Encyclias are extremely variable, produce showy displays of long-lasting flowers, are often highly fragrant, and just might become your new favorite genera of orchid!