

## RECENTLY IN FLOWER AT THE NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS

*Guarianthe bowringiana*

Synonyms: *Cattleya autumnalis* O'Brien 1888; *Cattleya skinneri* Bateman var. *bowringiana* (Veitch) Kraenzl. 1892; *Guarianthe bowringiana* (Veitch) Dressler & W.E. Higgins 2003

Common name; Bowring's Cattleya named after an ardent English amateur orchid enthusiast Mr. J. C. Bowring of Forest Farm. Introduced by Veitch in 1884, and first exhibited in London by its discoverer, James Veitch & Sons, on October 31, 1885. Veitch called the plant *Cattleya autumnalis*. It was described in the **Gardeners' Chronicle** on November 28, 1885 by the **Chronicle's** reviewer James O'Brien.



This robust epiphyte is closely allied to *Cattleya skinneri*, at one time being considered a variety of *C. skinneri*, but is readily distinguished by the small pseudobulb-like joint between the two leaves as well as by differences in the flowers.

*G. bowringiana* is a native of Belize and Guatemala. This medium to large sized, hot to warm growing lithophyte (growing on a rock) is found at elevations of 210m-900m on rocky cliffs near fast moving streams with a humid atmosphere.

*G. bowringiana* has tall cane like pseudobulbs covered with a thin papery sheathing, pseudobulbs can be 10-15in in height but can reach 20-30in when well grown, carrying 2/3 apical, narrowly oblong, leathery, dark green leaves, 6in-8in long. The terminal, erect or nodding, inflorescence (25 cm long) arises through 2 basal spathes each one carrying up to 15 flowers. With minimal care, this orchid can produce 8-16 flowers per spike, a specimen plant can produce more than 20 flowers per spike. The record of a plant with nine spikes bearing 195 flowers (almost 22 flowers per spike).

Flowers (non-fragrant) on average last 12-17 days, so well worth the effort.

Each flower has sepals and petals which are bright rose-purple in colour, with deeper veining, the petals much broader than the sepals and slightly wavy along the margins. The lip is narrowly tubular surrounding the column and similar in colour to the sepals and petals, the anterior portion of the lip flaring outward without distinct lobes, deep purple with a central crescent of maroon surrounding the white to yellowish throat.

After flowering *G. bowringiana* requires a short winter rest from water/ fertilizer. It is an ideal plant for the hobbyist as it grows rapidly indoors in strong, bright light in warm to intermediate temperatures. It is important to water once a week during the growing period with rain/untreated water, it is important not to over water. When the pseudobulbs have matured, watering should be reduced to avoid further growth of the plant and to induce formation of flowers. After flowering, the rest period commences and the plant should be left fairly dry, watering approximately every 2-3 weeks. It should be kept damp but by no means wet for the winter period.

Plant in a loose cattleya mix preferable in a pot or basket. It likes to be confined in it's pot and can be re-potted every year when the new roots start to show from the base of the lead pseudobulb. When re-potting make sure to keep the base of the pseudobulb level with the potting medium, so as not to inhibit the new growth from the base of the bulb.

Prices can vary online but I did see one online for €30.00. There are many clones and varieties available online. There is no true alba although the typical *G. bowringiana* is a medium-rose lavender with a somewhat darker lip, there are also clones with dark, vibrant purple flowers. A variety of albescens forms range from light lavender to almost white, and *G. bowringiana* has some of the best coerulea or "blue" clones. Sir Jeremiah Coleman, who pioneered the development of coerulea hybrids in cattleyas, had some of his best results using the blue clones of *G. bowringiana* — the clones 'Lilacina', 'Coerulea' and 'Violacea'.

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