

LARGEST ORCHID IN THE WORLD FLOWERS AT KEW



It's the first time the orchid, known as the 'queen of orchids' (*Grammatophyllum speciosum*), has flowered since it was collected 32 years ago from Malaysia.

Currently standing 1.5 metres high (5 feet,) the flower spike is growing around 1.5cm (.60") a day, with the spike expected to hit an astonishing three metres (nearly 10 feet.) Its impressive blooms are expected to last five to six weeks.

The queen of orchids is grown in Kew's behind-the-scenes Tropical Nursery. Visitors will be able to go behind the scenes at the Tropical Nursery to view this giant orchid.



Species information

Scientific name: *Grammatophyllum speciosum* Blume

Common name: queen of orchids, tiger orchid, giant orchid, sugar cane orchid

Conservation status: Listed in Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

Habitat: Lowland tropical rain forest.

Key Uses: Ornamental.

Known hazards: None known.

Taxonomy

Class: Equisetopsida

Subclass: Magnoliidae

Superorder: Lilianae

Order: Asparagales

Family: Orchidaceae

Genus: *Grammatophyllum*

Free tours to see the orchid while it's in flower will be available on Wednesdays at 1pm and 2pm, starting at White Peaks café. Though tours are free-of-charge, there's limited space available and pre-booking is essential. To book your place, contact info@kew.org.

Christopher Ryan, Tropical Nursery Supervisor at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew says: 'We were thrilled, and surprised, when this plant produced a flower spike as it is incredibly rare for these orchids to flower in cultivation in Europe. We are so lucky at Kew to have a glasshouse large enough to grow such a big specimen and also to have the incredible expertise to give this orchid the amount of care and attention it needs to bloom. What an honour to be able to finally see it flower at Kew!'

Rare in cultivation

This plant, which was collected by Phillip Cribb and Christopher Bailes in Sabah in 1983, produced a flowering spike for the first time in August 2015.

Queen of orchids is relatively rare in cultivation due to its enormous size, but is prized by orchid specialists for its showy flowers. It's also known as tiger orchid, giant orchid and sugar cane orchid, and is normally found growing in tall trees in Southeast Asia. The flowers are pale or greenish yellow, heavily spotted with chestnut markings.

Two tonne specimen at the Great Exhibition

The Queen of orchids is reputed to be the largest of all orchids, with its immense leafy stems, each several metres long in a mature specimen. A plant weighing two tonnes was one of the highlights in the 1851 Great Exhibition in Hyde Park in London.

<http://www.kew.org/discover/news/largest-orchid-world-flowers-kew>

