

Aerangis

Pronunciation: air-ANG-giss

Tribe: Vandeeae

Subtribe: Aerangidinae

The name *Aerangis* was coined from two Greek words, aer, air and angos, vessel, and was probably a reference to the nectariferous spur at the base of the lip. Plants allocated to this genus today are among the most attractive of the white-flowered vandaceous orchids of Africa and its adjacent islands, including Madagascar.

Many species of *Aerangis* were first described under the name *Angraecum*. It was in 1865 that H.G. Reichenbach proposed the genus *Aerangis*, separating it from *Angraecum* on account of the long slender rostellum that stretches forward from below the column apex, across the stigmatic surface, and by the long slender stipe that is located on the upper surface of this rostellum and supports the two pollinia.

A major contribution to the recognition of the genus was that of the German botanist Rudolf Schlechter. In 1914 he transferred some of the well-known Madagascar species from *Angraecum* to *Aerangis* and in 1918 made an important review of all the African angraecoid orchids that dealt with an additional 11 species of *Aerangis*. More species have been added to the genus since then. Some 51 species and a few natural hybrids are currently recognized.

Species most commonly found in cultivation include *A. articulata*, *A. biloba*, *A. citrata*, *A. ellisii*, *A. fastuosa*, *A. luteo-alba* with its variety *rhodosticta* and *A. modesta*.

Number of species: 51 (Currently the World Monocot Checklist recognizes 50 distinct species, 2 natural hybrids and several varietal forms - 9/2007).

Distribution: Africa and its adjacent islands, including Madagascar.

CULTURE:

Temperature: It is not difficult to grow any of the species of *Aerangis* but the plants are easily lost if growing conditions change adversely. The species from higher elevations need cooler conditions than those that occur at or near sea level, and those from near the Equator generally require warmer conditions and higher humidity than those that are found much further south at the same elevation. Details of the habitat, where known, often give an indication of the best way to manage the environment for plants in cultivation.

Light: Plants in cultivation need well-shaded conditions, similar to those enjoyed by *Phalaenopsis* species and hybrids.

Water-Humidity: The most difficult thing to arrange, in cultivation, is the resting season that most species enjoy after flowering. If the plants are kept too dry, there is the danger that they will dry out too much and lose their leaves. If they are sprayed with too much cold water or too frequently, the plants will suffer, lose their leaves and die. Careful management of both the plants and their environment is the key to long-lived plants and the reward of many flowers every year.

Fertilizer: Plants need only weak liquid fertilizer, during the growing season when new roots and new leaves are produced.

Potting: All of the plants will grow well in pots of medium suitable for most other epiphytes; those with finer roots need a smaller particle size and moister conditions than those with thicker roots. All species grow well as mounted plants, firmly attached to a piece of bark or cork. Mounted plants should be suspended in deep shade, usually in high humidity. The flowers are naturally and elegantly displayed when the plants are grown like this.