

# Ansellia

Pronunciation: an-SELL-ee-uh

Tribe: Cymbidieae

Subtribe: Cyrtopodiinae

Owing to the extraordinarily wide range of this species, *Ansellia africana*, there is great variation in plant and flower size, as well as in the coloration and patterning of the blooms. The plants are similar in that they are formed of upright clusters of slender, cigar-shaped pseudobulbs crowned with five to seven leaves that may be held generally upright to slightly arching. The leaves are evenly broad along their length, tapering to a roundly pointed tip. Leaves are generally medium green, while the pseudobulbs range from greenish cream to a mustardy yellow color. Smaller forms range from 12" – 18" tall, while some of the larger, more southerly forms may attain 48" or more in height. The overall plant habit is compact and freely branching, easily forming sizeable clumps. In nature, upright aerial roots form an effective detritus trap, and this feature is not uncommon in cultivation.

Inflorescences are usually terminal, though occasionally smaller flower stems may emerge from lower leaf axils. The terminal inflorescences are upright to arching, and are often profusely branched. Flowers are well held, though some forms do tend to "nod," forcing the viewer to look up into the display to fully appreciate the beauty. The most popularly used common name is Leopard Orchid, and it is easy to see why. While some forms are albinistic to albino, with pure yellow green blooms, and others so heavily blotched with dark chocolate brown to appear black, most forms are mustard yellow variously marked with dark brown spots and blotches. Just like its Leopard namesake, markings vary from plant to plant. Flowers are very variable in size, ranging from around an inch, to nearly three inches in some of the finer and larger growing forms cultivated in South Africa. Petals and sepal are essentially equal in size and carriage, with a smaller lip. Form is open and flat, with some of the best forms being relatively full. Most people comment on the strong musky fragrance, which some find pleasant and others objectionable.

Highly select forms – very dark, albino, or large and full formed – are now entering the trade and can be relatively easily had, whether as divisions or seed-raised.

This is an excellent subject for frost-free areas where it can be a valuable addition to the landscape, quickly forming a showy clump in the crook of a tree or in a large basket. Growers in cooler climates should look for the smaller growing forms, which are no larger than a standard *Cattleya*.

Number of species: 1 – widely distributed and quite variable.

Distribution: Tropical and South Africa

## CULTURE:

Temperature: *Cattleya* conditions – 55 – 60 nights, 80 – 90 days

Light: Bright, as for cattleyas, may take nearly full sun in tropical conditions

Water & Humidity: Moderate humidity of 50% or so with ample water during the growing season, allowing to dry between waterings. Allow to remain dry for an extra couple of days during winter months.

Fertilizer: Depends on your growing media, but a balanced formula, applied regularly will work fine. These plants grow quickly during warmer months and can reach prodigious size, so a good supply of fertilizer is a must.

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Page 1

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