

Laelia

Pronunciation: lay-LEE-uh

Tribe: Epidendreae
Subtribe: Laeliinae

Laelia is a tropical genus of epiphytic and lithophytic plants that produce fairly to exceptionally showy flowers. It is not certain what "*Laelia*" means, but it seems that Lindley gave the genus the name of one of the Vestal Virgins from Greek Mythology, referring to their beauty. The genus, as presently accepted, comprises seven fairly uniform sections that are quite different among themselves (and the source of much debate regarding their taxonomy). Three of these sections occur in Mexico (and share many structural features) while the majority of species, which are included in the other four, occur in Brazil. Many of the Mexican species (***Laelia anceps***, for example), grow in dry areas where the plants are subject to very low temperatures and even frost, and so they should be grown cooler for their best development. The Brazilian species can be found from sea level up into the mountains, so their growing conditions vary from very warm to cool depending on the particular species. The type species is ***Laelia speciosa***, a Mexican species with compact plants and very showy large flowers.

The most numerous section in the genus is **Parviflorae**, the so-called "Rupicolous laelias" from Brazil, which includes more than half the species (35+). This section is considered by some taxonomists to belong to the genus *Sophronitis* while others classify them as *Hoffmannseggella*. Section **Cattleyodes** contains those Brazilian species that strongly resemble Cattleyas. This group produces some of the largest flowers in the genus, including ***Laelia purpurata***, the Brazilian national flower. There is also much current debate regarding this section as well. Some taxonomists classify them as *Sophronitis* while others see them as belonging to *Cattleya* or a separate genus of their own.

Number of species: Around 70, color forms in the hundreds. It should be noted that there is currently great debate regarding which species should actually be included in this genus. The World Monocot Checklist currently recognizes only 22 species; the "rupicolous laelias" (sec. **Parviflorae**) and those of section **Cattleyodes** have been moved to *Sophronitis*. In addition, many former *Schomburgkia* species have been moved to *Myrmecophila* and the remaining species transferred to ***Laelia***

CULTURE:

- Temperature:** Cool to intermediate to warm, depending on species.
- Light:** Intermediate to bright, good to very good air movement.
- Water-Humidity:** Seasonal, high during the growing season (spring-fall) and usually low during the rest period (usually fall-winter). Mexican species like it especially dry during the rest period, while shadier-growing species such as some hadrolaelias (rupicolous species such as ***L. pumila***) prefer more uniform humidity throughout the year.
Balanced fertilizer during the growing season (see above), weekly. Half to a quarter concentration during the rest period (see above).
- Fertilizer:** More uniform fertilizing schedule for the hadrolaelias.
- Potting:** Brazilian laelias are grown usually in pots, mainly because the plants can get big (**Cattleyodes**), or because they grow on rocks (lithophytic) in their native habitat (**Parviflorae**). Mexican species like ***Laelia anceps*** are frequently grown on slabs. This is a basic indication of how dry they prefer to grow, but plants are very tolerant except for overwatering. The growing medium should thus have good to very good drainage depending on which group of species you are growing.