

# Maxillaria

**Pronunciation:** max-ih-LARE-ee-uh

**Tribe:** Maxillarieae

**Subtribe:** Maxillariinae

**Maxillaria**, epiphytes with a sympodial growth habit, is one of the largest genera of New World orchids. The generic name is derived from the Latin *maxilla* (jawbone) since the lip and column resemble the jaws of insects. Botanists seem to agree that there are two major groups in the genus based on how the pseudobulbs are arranged. One group consists of species with tightly clustered tufts, pseudobulbless according to some (e.g. *M. cucullata*). The other group is made up of species with longer internodes and rhizomes of varying lengths (e.g. *M. tenuifolia*). It remains to be seen if taxonomists continue to regard both of these groups as pieces of a single genus or decide that the genus is a cosmopolitan assemblage and continue to create additional segregate genera. Most species of **Maxillaria** have only one leaf but some species have up to four. The inflorescence is one flowered with some species producing clusters of inflorescences from the base of each individual pseudobulb. Flower size ranges broadly from ½ inch to over 6 inches in diameter. Regardless of the size, all flowers of the different species have 3 sepals, similar in size, color and triangular shape and two petals, much smaller than the sepals. Some maxillarias are fragrant, such as the popular *M. tenuifolia*, commonly known as the coconut orchid because of its coconut-like fragrance.

Many of the species once considered belonging to **Maxillaria** have been removed to allied genera such as *Lycaste*, *Xylobium*, *Ornithidium*, *Camaridium* and *Pseudomaxillaria*. **Maxillaria** is a genus found mostly in specialty collections although *M. tenuifolia* is more widespread and often found even in beginners' collections because of its beautiful fragrance and ease of growth.

**Number of species:** It is highly probable that **Maxillaria** contains more than one genus. As a result, some authors recognize up to 700 or more species while others recognize far fewer.

**Distribution:** From Florida through the West Indies and Central America to southern Brazil and northern Argentina

**Temperature:** The bulk of the species do very well under intermediate temperatures (55F nights/85F days). Those species from high elevations will require cooler temperatures while those from hot lowlands will require warmer conditions.

**Light:** Most species respond well under bright light but no direct sun. Conditions similar to those for cattleyas.

**Water-Humidity:** Most species should be watered year round. They should be watered thoroughly and then allowed to nearly dry before watering again. Since the majority of species come from humid or cloud forests, humidity should be maintained at 40-70% year round.

**Fertilizer:** Use a dilute, one-quarter to one-half strength orchid fertilizer about twice monthly during the growing season.

**Potting:** Many species are intolerant of being disturbed so a well-drained epiphyte potting medium should be chosen. Repotting should take place only when new growth AND new roots are visible

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