

# Phaius

Pronunciation: FAY-us

Tribe: Arethuseae

Subtribe: Blettiinae

*Phaius tankervilleae* was introduced into England in 1778 by John Fothergill, who brought the plant from China. The genus was identified by Juan Loureiro, who also named it using the Greek word *phaios* (swarthy), probably because of the yellow–brown flower color that dominates the genus. *Phaius tankervilleae* is commonly called the nun's orchid, possibly due to the lateral view of the column, which resembles a Madonna.

The genus contains around 50 pseudobulbous, sympodial, robust species with very short rhizomes. There are both terrestrial and epiphytic species, with the terrestrials most widely known.

The thickened, stocky pseudobulbs are hidden by the ensheathing leaf bases. Each pseudobulb is enclosed by 2 to 8 large, thin, deeply grooved leaves, up to 4 feet (120 cm) long and 10 inches (25 cm) wide. Many flowers are borne on the 3 to 4 foot (90 -120 cm) tall inflorescences. The 4 inch (10 cm) wide flowers are very showy and distinctive.

Several different species native to Madagascar are encountered in the trade under the name *Phaius*. While very closely related, there are sufficient differences between these species and true *Phaius* to warrant their segregation under a distinct genus. These eight species are now known as *Gastrorchis* (for instance *G. pulchra*).

*Phaius* and the related *Gastrorchis* can be propagated in an unusual way. Once the flowers are spent, the flower stem can be cut above the base and just below where the first flower was attached. The remaining section is from 1 to several feet (30+ cm) long. Below each bract on the stem is a bud capable of producing a new plant. The stems are laid horizontally in a flat of moist sphagnum moss. Both ends are covered with moss to prevent drying out. The flat containing many stems is then placed under the bench and kept moist. As soon as the young plants have 2 or 3 roots, they can be snapped off the parent stem and placed in individual pots. Plantlets will require 2 to 3 years to attain flowering size.

**Number of species:** The World Monocot Checklist currently recognizes 48 species.

**Distribution:** India, Bhutan, Burma, Thailand, S. China, Laos, Vietnam, Taiwan and adjacent islands and the Philippines

## CULTURE:

**Temperature:** 60 degrees F (15 C) minimum

**Light:** 2400-3600 footcandles

**Water-Humidity:** 40-70% humidity; ample water during periods of growth, once growth is completed, keep the plant much drier in slightly cooler conditions.

**Fertilizer:** Medium 1) Monthly with a 1-1-1 ratio as recommended on the container; Medium 2) When the inflorescence appears, with a 1-1-1 ratio.

**Potting:** 1) A mixture of 1 part peat : 1 part soil or 2) A mixture of 1 part loam : 1 part rotted cow manure : 1 part peat -OR- for ease of potting and growing: PURE MOIST but not SOPPING WET Sphagnum Moss

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