

# *Phragmipedium* (The Lady Slipper Orchid)

**Pronunciation:** frag-mi-PEE-dee-um

**Tribe:** Cyripedieae  
**Subtribe:** none

Similar in many ways to the other slipper orchids, the paphiopedilums, selenipediums and cyripediums *Phragmipedium* is a very popular genus that was established by Robert Rolfe in 1896 when he revised all the slipper orchids. Those species native to the tropical Americas were placed in either *Selenipedium* or *Phragmipedium*. Rolfe named the genus, using the Greek words *phragma* (fence) in reference to the division of the ovary and *pedilon* (slipper). As with the other slipper orchids, the species of this genus are sympodial in growth habit and form tight fans instead of pseudobulbs. All species are either epiphytic or terrestrial and grow at elevations between 1300-7200 feet (400 to 2,200 meters). Inflorescences can be up to 3 ft. (90 cm) long and can bear up to 15 flowers. The flowers themselves can measure 30 inches (75 cm) or more from the tip of the dorsal sepal to the tip of a lateral petal. The flowers, once thought to consist mainly of yellows, greens and browns, some with yellow and purplish patterns, now include orange, red (*P. besseae*) and even magenta (*P. kovachii*). Popular species include *P. boissierianum*, *P. caudatum*, *P. longifolium*, *P. sargentianum*.

**Number of species:** The World Monocot Checklist contains 26 accepted names including several varietal forms and 1 natural hybrid (9/2007).

**Distribution:** From Mexico to Brazil and Bolivia

## CULTURE:

**Temperature:** Requirements vary. 55F – 100F, depending on species.

**Light:** 1000 footcandles in the hot Summer months, 1,400 footcandles in the cooler months.

**Water-Humidity:** Wait until potting medium is starting to dry out but not completely dry before watering. Water thoroughly until water runs freely through the drain holes in the pot. *Phrag. besseae* and its hybrids are best kept with the base of the pot sitting in 1" of water.

**Fertilizer:** Fertilize with a balanced, water-soluble formula at 150-200ppm (parts per million). Fertilizer is applied from October through May on the day after every other watering. Ensure two waterings between every fertilizer application to remove any residual salts from previous applications. Discontinue fertilizer during hot Summer months to prevent salt burns as a result of plant taking up too much fertilizer.

**Potting:** A fairly porous mix is recommended, consisting of five parts medium fir bark, two parts Canadian peat and one part each charcoal, extra coarse Sponge Rok #4 and ½-inch (1.25-cm) Stalite. Combine components in these proportions to produce a mix that provides support for the roots while allowing them to breath and resist becoming water-logged.

Page 1

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