Basic Orchid Glossary

Though by no means a comprehensive glossary listing, below you will find a basic orchid glossary

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adventitious bud — Meristem originating from a single cell or group of cells not part of preexisting meristem.

adventitious propagation — The use of tissue culture to produce whole plants from adventitious buds. Can lead to high levels of somaclonal variation, unlike micropropagation.

aerial root — Any root produced above the growing medium.

anther — The part of the stamen containing the pollen; the end of the column.

axillary bud — Preexisting meristem within the axil of a leaf that is normally inactive in growth.

backbulb — An old pseudobulb behind the part of a sympodial orchid that is actively growing. Although there may be no leaves the presence of undamaged "eyes" is a sign that growth is possible.

bifoliate — Having two leaves.

cane — An elongated psuedobulb, usually used when describing Dendrobiums.

crock — Small pieces of broken earthenware or flower pots, placed in the bottom of a pot when repotting to aid in drainage.

cultivar — An individual plant and its vegetative propagations in cultivation; a horticultural variety.

diploid — A plant with two sets of chromosomes. The normal condition.

epiphyte, epiphytic — A plant which naturally grows upon another plant but does not derive any nourishment from it. Many of the orchids in cultivation are epiphytic.

eye — The bud of a sympodial orchid that will eventually develop into a new lead.

foliar spray — Many minor nutrients and trace elements beneficial to growth are best absorbed through the stomata of an orchids leaves when mixed with water and sprayed on the plant.

genus (pl. genera) — A natural grouping of closely related species.

habitat — The type of place in which a plant normally grows.

hybrid — The offspring of a cross between species or hybrids.

inflorescence — The flowering portion of a plant.

intergeneric hybrid — A hybrid between members of two or more genera.

keiki — A Hawaiian word referring to a baby plant produced asexually by an orchid plant, usually used when referring to Dendrobiums or Vandaceous orchids.

lead — An immature vegetative growth on a sympodial orchid that will develop into flower-producing structure.

lip — A modified petal of the orchid flower specialized to aid in pollination and different than the other petals.

lithophyte — An orchid that grows on rocks.

medium — The material in which an orchid is container-grown, it may be organic such as fir bark or inorganic such as lava rock.

mericlone — A plant derived from tissue culture that is identical to its parent.

meristem — The actively growing area of the plant from which mature tissues such as leaf, stems, flowers and roots originate.

micropropagation — The use of tissue culture to grow inactive axillary buds into whole plants with very little somaclonal variation, unlike adventitious propagation.

monopodial — Orchids which grow upward from a single stem producing leaves and flowers along that stem.

node — A joint on a stem or pseudobulb from which a leaf or growth originates.

panicle — An inflorescence with a main stem and branches, the flowers on the lower branches open earlier than the upper ones.

photosynthesis — The process a plant uses to produce carbohydrates and sugar from water and carbon dioxide in the air using chlorophyl-containing cells exposed to light.

polyploid — A plant with more than the normal two sets of chromosomes.

pseudobulb — A thickened portion of the stem of many orchids functioning as a water and food storage device.

raceme — An unbranched inflorescence of stalked flowers.

rhizome — A root-bearing stem of sympodial orchids that progressively sends up leafy shoots.

scape — An unbranched inflorescence with one flower.

sheath — A modified leaf that encloses an emerging inflorescence or leaf.

somaclonal variation — Genetic variants arising from tissue culture.

species — A kind of plant that is distinct from other plants.

spike — An unbranched inflorescence of unstalked flowers.

stem propagation — See micropropagation.

stolon — A branch that grows horizontally above the medium and produces roots and shoots at the nodes.

stomata — The breathing pores on the surface of a plant's leaves.

sympodial — Orchids which grow laterally and produce leafy growths along a rhizome.

terrestrial — Growing on the ground and supported by soil.

tetraploid — A plant with four sets of chromosomes. A normal plant is diploid with two sets of chromosomes. Most modern complex orchids hybrids are tetraploid. Compared to diploids, tetraploids general have larger, fuller and heavier substanced flowers.

tissue culture — The technique of culturing cells on a sterile synthetic media. There are two general methods use to propagate plants -- micropropagation and adventitious propagation.

unifoliate — Having one leaf.

velamen — The thick sponge-like covering of the roots of epiphytic orchids which helps prevent water loss and aids in absorption.

virus — A type of infectious agent, much smaller than common microorganisms, several forms of which affect certain kinds of orchids.