



New boom to old bloom

If you go

- What: "Orchid Mania"
- Where: Cleveland Botanical Garden, 11030 East Blvd. Cleveland's University Circle neighborhood
- When: Through March 29 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday Noon to 5 p.m. Sunday
- Admission: \$7.50 adults (\$5 after 5 p.m. Wednesdays); \$3 for those 3 through 12; \$5.50 seniors on Tuesday
- Information: 216-721-1600; www.cb garden.org or 216.721.1600; www.cb garden.org



A first: Orchids shown off in Botanical Garden's Madagascar and Costa Rica glasshouses

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ABOVE: Cynthia Druckenbrod, director of horticulture for Cleveland Botanical Garden, anchors an orchid to the archway in the Costa Rica cloud forest biome where Orchid Mania is under way. **RIGHT:** The Miltonia orchid is nicknamed the pansy orchid because of its resemblance to the popular garden flower.

"Most people don't realize that there are orchids that grow in the desert. In fact, the Angraecum orchid in our Madagascar glasshouse was popularized by Charles Darwin."

Cynthia Druckenbrod, director of horticulture for Cleveland Botanical Garden

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Orchids blooming at shows far and near

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Just when winter is getting really old and there's barely a sign that spring will ever come, it's orchids to the rescue.

The annual "Orchid Mania" show, which opened Saturday at Cleveland Botanical Garden, can provide solace for the winter-weary. But this year, for the first time, the orchids will be showcased in the Madagascar and Costa Rica biomes of the Garden's Eleanor Armstrong Smith Glasshouse.

"Most people don't realize that there are orchids that grow in the desert," said Cynthia Druckenbrod, the garden's director of horticulture. "In fact, the Angraecum orchid in our Madagascar glasshouse was popularized by Charles Darwin."

Darwin, whose 200th birthday would have been Feb. 12, hypothesized that the Angraecum orchid's 12-inch-long nectar spur meant there was a moth or butterfly with a foot-long tongue, or proboscis, to pollinate it.

"That moth was finally discovered after Darwin died," Druckenbrod said.

By far, the greatest number of orchids will be seen on the lower

level of the two-level Costa Rica cloud forest glasshouse.

"The upper level is too bright for orchids, but from up there you get a great view of all the flowers below," Druckenbrod said.

Orchids are the most numerous flowering plant on earth, with more than 300,000 registered cultivars. They grow on every continent except Antarctica and, if properly cared for, can live longer than a human.

Orchids have long been valued by many civilizations. They were known in China five centuries before Christ, when Confucius compared them to good friends. Vanilla, the only commercial product of orchids, was discovered by the ancient Aztecs and introduced in Europe in the early 1700s. In the 19th century there was such a demand for orchids in England that their price reached hundreds of pounds for a single plant.

One of the first to successfully cultivate a large collection of orchids was Englishman William Cattley, from whom the popular Cattleya orchid takes its name.

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Orchids come in all shapes, sizes, colors and fragrances.

Found in the wild at the tops of tall trees in South and Central America, it is one of the most popular orchids in cultivation. The Phalaenopsis, or Moth Orchid, which often flowers for months at a time, is considered the best orchid for beginners.

Orchids can be grown in habitats ranging from tropical rain forests to alpine meadows and are widely found in the wild, even in Ohio.

The largest and showiest of all the orchids occur in the tropics, where their flowers' colors range from pure white to vivid pink, golden-yellow to lavender, red, brown and even blackish purple.

Many orchid varieties are without scent, and some only have an aroma at certain times of day.

Many of the orchids at "Orchid Mania" will be displayed in a way that allows visitors to get close looks at the flowers and smell their aromas, which include lemon, spice and even chocolate.

The display in the glasshouses comes with the bonus of seeing the creatures that live there. Butterflies flutter freely in the Costa Rica biome.

A new batch is released at 2 p.m. each day.

Huge chameleons live in the Madagascar biome, and beautiful



Jeff Forman/JForman@News-Herald.com

Glass house specialist Nate Tschaenn works to install an orchid among the rocks in the Costa Rica biome at the Cleveland Botanical Garden.

tropical birds fly freely in the Costa Rica cloud forest biome.

Binoculars aren't a bad idea for bird lovers.

"Some of the birds are mating and nesting now, and those who come early in the day will see that the birds are most active in the morning," Druckenbrod said.

Seeing Bananaquits or Red Legged Honeycreepers is almost better than spotting the first spring robin.

And in the Madagascar garden the Red-billed Fire Finch and

Gold-breasted Waxbill have been weaving nests over many of the plants.

Orchids will also be on display in the lobby and in the botanical garden's Eppig Gallery, where three magnificent glass-blown orchids — one flower is 5 feet wide — are displayed. They're the work of Debora Moore, who worked with famed glass artist Dale Chihuly.

The area's top orchid growers, including Borlin's Orchids in Mentor, will bring a large variety

of unusual orchids for Vendor's Weekend on Saturday and March 8.

Ailing orchids belonging to hobbyists can be brought to the garden for diagnosis by the Orchid Doctor from 1 to 3 p.m. March 14 and March 21.

Perhaps the real mania of "Orchid Mania" won't happen until March 29. The "Orchid Mania" Plant Sale, when the plants are sold to the public at less than their wholesale prices, begins at 5 p.m. that day.