



# What is an Orchid Species?

It's all in the name. Orchids are either species or hybrids. An orchid species can be identified by two Latin terms which are italicized. The first word of the name designates the genus. The first word will be capitalized (*Cattleya*, *Oncidium*, *Vanda*). Botanists abbreviate generic names with the first letter (C. for *Cattleya*, O. for *Oncidium*, V. for *Vanda*). Sometimes the first word will be a short abbreviation, like *Epi.*, *Epidendrum* or *Phal.*, *Phalaenopsis*.



The second word is also italicized but will be in lower case (*maxima*, *ampliatum*, *coerulea*). This is a specific epithet that denotes the species name. These epithets may indicate the place of origin (*costaricensis*, Costa Rica), the person who found the orchid (*besseae*, Libby Besse), a characteristic of the orchid (*glabra*, smooth), or used to honor an individual. In any case, the species name imparts information. For instance, *coccinea* means red and *philippinense* designates discovered in the Philippines.



There may also be a third name which indicates a variety or cultivar (*Cattleya dowiana* var. *aurea*). A variety indicates a subspecies. Subspecies begin with lowercase letters and are italicized. A cultivar name will not be italicized but will be capitalized and the name will appear in single quotes ('Sweetie Pie'). Hybrids may have cultivar names too. When vegetatively propagated through division, keikis or mericlones, all derivatives of a cultivar will be genetically identical and will carry the same cultivar name.



Superior examples of crosses often receive cultivar names, in which case, the name will be followed by an award designation, like AM/AOS or HCC/AOS. The American Orchid Society (AOS) grants awards to species and hybrids. The letters before the slash are the abbreviation for the award. (AM – Award of Merit, HCC – Highly Commended Certificate) The letters following the slash indicate the organization bestowing the award. American Orchid Society (AOS) and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) are commonly seen,

