



San Diego Zoo

Botanical Tours



Orchids



Most of these orchids can be found in the Orchid Greenhouse which is open to the public at specific times each month and found between Map Locators 9 and 10.



Myrmecophila tibicinis

Look for this large epiphytic orchid attached to the trees at the top of Fern Canyon Trail, just off Treetops Way.

Fun Fact

Ants are known to take shelter in the dried, hollowed-out bulbs of this species.

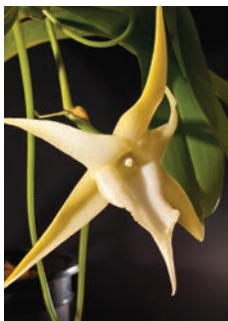


Vanilla planifolia

This orchid's seed pod is the source of vanilla beans. Vanilla production is the most labor-intensive agricultural crop in the world.

Fun Fact

Because of its economic importance, this plant is also called the "orchid of commerce."



Angraecum sesquipedale

This plant is often called Darwin's orchid because of his study of it. Darwin predicted that a pollinator of this flower would need to have a long tongue, and he was right! It turned out to be a then-unidentified type of sphinx moth.

Fun Fact

The word *sesquipedale* in this orchid's scientific name is Latin for "one and a half feet"—a reference to its long nectar channel.

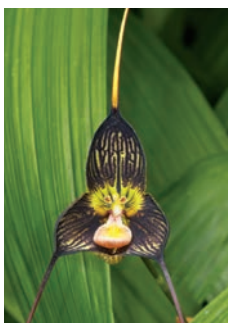


Stelis tarantula

This plant imitates a large, hairy spider. Mimicry is important to pollination in orchids. All orchid flowers have evolved to attract pollinators while maintaining the same basic floral structure: three sepals, three petals, and a central column.

Fun Fact

This orchid blooms are hidden under the leaves of the plant, just as a tarantula might hide. The blossoms are covered with stiff hairs, again like a tarantula!

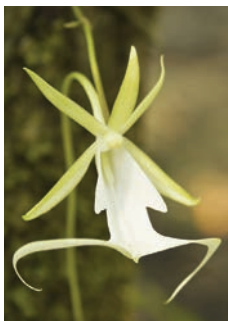


Dracula vampira

Dracula orchids mimic the smell and shape of mushrooms in order to attract their pollinators. Flies looking to lay eggs on mushrooms are attracted to the flowers by the scent of the lip and pattern of the sepals.

Fun Fact

Orchids are often thought of as needing heat, but this species grows in the cool cloud forests of South America.



Dendrophylax lindenii

Native to southern Florida, this leafless orchid goes unnoticed until its large white flower appears. Because of this, it is sometimes called “ghost orchid.”

Fun Fact

This orchid was made famous by the books, *The Orchid Thief* and *Orchid Fever*, and the movie *Adaptation*.



Paphiopedilum sanderianum

The unique petals of this orchid can reach lengths of 24 to 36 inches—they often touch the ground! This rare species was first discovered in 1885, but was not found again for about 100 years.

Fun Fact

The long petals act as a “ladder” that pollinating insects climb to access the flower’s pollen.



Paphiopedilum tigrinum

This critically endangered species is a delight to see in bloom, with its striking maroon and yellow blossoms. It first entered the Zoo’s collection in 1990 as a plant confiscation.

Fun Fact

The San Diego Zoo is a plant rescue center for plants imported without the proper permits.



Guarianthe aurantiaca

Unlike most cattleya orchids, this plant’s blossoms are only an inch wide, but are very fragrant. This species is native to the low mountains and tropical rainforests of Mexico and El Salvador.

Fun Fact

The name *aurantiaca* means orange in Latin, describing the color of this orchid’s blooms.



Why Orchids?

The orchid collection at the San Diego Zoo fulfills three purposes:

1. The desire to represent the plants and flowers that grow in the environments of major animal habitats.
2. The need, as a designated Plant Rescue Center, to provide an appropriate environment for border confiscations of endangered species.
3. The goal of providing education about the most exotic of nature's flowers as part of our commitment to connecting our visitors with wildlife and conservation.

Conservation

All orchids are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). It is illegal, whether for profit or pleasure, knowingly or unknowingly, to transport orchids across international borders without the proper paperwork.

The Zoo's orchid collection provides *ex situ* conservation by growing, propagating, and sharing them with other botanical gardens. San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance assists in conservation of orchids *in situ* through collaboration and conservatorship of natural habitats around the world.



Collection

The orchid family is one of the largest in the plant world, with species growing on every continent of the planet except Antarctica.

The San Diego Zoo's diverse orchid collection contains 189 of the approximately 880 recognized genera. Because we are a plant rescue center, we have hundreds of the same species in some cases and singular specimens of others.

Among the most fascinating are the border confiscations of the Paphiopedilums, including threatened species such as *P. druryii*, *P. rothschildianum*, *P. sanderianum*, and *P. hangianum*.

There are also many unusual specimens from South America, including *Epidendrum ilense* and *Mexipedium xerophyticum*, along with genera *Sobralias*, *Draculas*, *Masdevallias*, *Pleurothallis*, *Cattleya*, and *Laelias*.



**Exclusive
Video!**

See why pollination is a snap for one orchid species. sdzwa.org/orchidvideo



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