



# St. Augustine Orchid Society

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

## Cold Hardy Orchids

by Sue Bottom, [sbottom15@hotmail.com](mailto:sbottom15@hotmail.com)

Our orchids love to summer outdoors. They love the refreshing breezes, the drop in nighttime temperatures, the dappled sunlight and occasional rainstorm. But, summer inevitably turns into fall, and winter soon follows. Our winters are usually pretty mild except for the occasional cold front. A night with frosty air can happen anytime from November to March, but is most common in January. Even after a crisp night, everything usually thaws out during the day. There are, on average, 4 nights of cool to freezing temperatures in any given year.

St. Augustine Minimum Temperatures			
Average Number of Days/Month Temp Drops Below			
	50° F	40° F	32° F
September	0	0	0
October	1	0	0
November	8	2	0
December	15	6	1
January	18	8	2
February	14	5	1
March	10	2	0
April	3	0	0
Year	69	23	4
<a href="https://www.currentresults.com/Weather/Florida/Places/st-augustine-temperatures-by-month-average.php">https://www.currentresults.com/Weather/Florida/Places/st-augustine-temperatures-by-month-average.php</a>			

Most of the orchids that can tolerate our hot summers require some sort of protection in winter, although some are more cold sensitive than others. The most cold sensitive are phalaenopsis, the large two toned vandas, the evergreen hard cane dendrobiums and the mule eared oncidiums that prefer temps above 60°F but tolerate temps in 50's. Winter night temperatures in the mid-50's are fine for cattleyas and oncidiums, but they can tolerate temps in the mid-40's. As a rule, move most of your orchids into their winter homes by November 15 and don't return them to the great outdoors until April.



*Dendrobiums Enjoying Coolish, Dryish Winter*

The dendrobiums are a highly variable group, but there are some that enjoy warm summers and are very tolerant of colder weather. These types of dendrobiums actually flower better when exposed to drier and cooler conditions during the winter, enjoying

There are some fairly cold tolerant varieties that can stay outdoors on all but the coldest nights. These varieties are fine when nighttime temperatures are in the low to mid 40's, and tolerate temps dropping into the mid- to high-30's. You may have to protect them several times during the coldest nights. You can move them into the garage, wrap them with blankets/frost cloth, etc. to prevent cold damage. Then they can be moved back outdoors until the next artic cold front is predicted.



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nighttime temps in the low to mid 40's and tolerating tolerate temps in the mid- to high-30's. These types include the spring blooming upright nobile types, the pendulous seminobiles (like *Den. anosum*) and the Callista section with showy pendant golden grapelike flowers (like *Den. aggregatum*). The Australian dendrobiums (like *Den. kingianum* and *Den. speciosum*) are even more cold tolerant accepting temperatures down into the 30's.



*Den. griffithianum*



*Den. Adastra 'Berkeley' AM/AOS*



*Den. kingianum var. alba*



*Den. speciosum*



*Neofinetia falcata*

Many vandaceous orchids prefer warm conditions although there are some varieties like *Vanda coerulea*, *denisoniana* and *tessellata* that are more cold tolerant. *Neofinetia falcata* is probably the most cold tolerant vandaceous orchid accepting of temperatures in the lower 40's and tolerating temperature drops into the 30's.

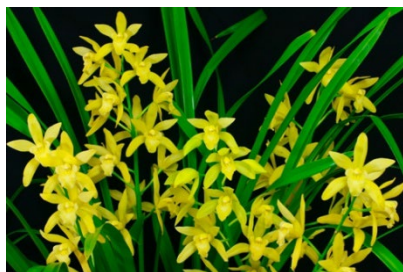


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*Cym.* Hawaiian Gold 'Nugget'

Cymbidiums are also very cold tolerant accepting of temperatures down into 30's. Our problem with growing cymbidiums in Florida is that many cannot tolerate our summer heat, so you have to be very careful in selecting which varieties to grow here. They can be naturalized by growing in your planting beds, but you may have to cover them with frost cloth to protect buds and flowers from damage during freezing temperatures.

Many of us would like to naturalize orchids in our landscape. There are some terrestrial orchids that can be planted in the ground and will survive the winter to bloom in the warmer months. [Plant Delights Nursery](#) in Raleigh, North Carolina has a great selection; just make sure you select varieties suitable for Zone 9b or higher. Their website has a great article about growing [Hardy Orchids in the Garden](#) with details on sun and moisture requirements as well as bed preparation. We are trialing some of their varieties, planning to grow them in pots for a growing season before we find the perfect spot in the yard. Here are some easy to grow suggestions:



*Bletilla striata*

photo courtesy of Juniper Level Botanical Garden



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We brought *Bletilla striata* plants over from Houston and have had them in the ground for over 20 years, blooming in the early spring. Plant Delights nursery has quite a few varieties in colors ranging from white, pink, yellow, purple and bluish. From Plant Delights: *Bletilla striata* is a hardy and very easy-to-grow terrestrial orchid with upright, heavily textured, iris-like, 18" long x 3" wide green leaves and forms a slowly spreading clump. In early spring, stalks to 30" tall of very small lavender, cattleya orchid-like flowers with a dark purple lip are held atop the foliage. The rhizomes spread slowly and eventually form a nice mass. *Bletilla striata* grows best in moist-to-damp soils in 1-6 hours of sun. While they may grow in shade, flowering will be sparse if at all.



*Spiranthes cernua* 'Chadds Ford'  
photo credit Juniper Level Botanical Garden

We have enjoyed the Ladies Tresses orchids we see growing next to roadway ditches in our neighborhood. We ordered some *Spiranthes vernalis* 'Wake Up' that were just emerging from dormancy and put them in a pot to get them established. From Plant Delights: *Spiranthes bightensis* 'Chadds Ford', formerly listed as *Spiranthes cernua*, is an easy-to-grow native orchid that ranges from Virginia north to New Jersey (editor's note: hardy through Zone 9b). The ground-hugging, dark-green rosettes spread slowly by short underground rhizomes, creating a nice colony when growing in moist but well-drained organic soils. In mid-September, the rosettes produce 18" tall spikes spiraled with small, white, bell-shaped flowers, emitting a delightful fragrance often described as a cross between vanilla and jasmine. *Spiranthes* 'Chadds Ford' was discovered in the 1960s by orchid fancier Dick Ryan just before the habitat near his

hometown of Bear, Delaware, was to be developed. It went on to fame, winning the Certificate of Cultural Merit from the American Orchid Society. DNA work determined that *Spiranthes bightensis* started life as an ancient hybrid between *Spiranthes cernua* and *Spiranthes odorata*, before speciating.

Calanthes might be a perfect pick for a shady spot in your garden. We have all seen the Phaius and Phaius-Calanthe hybrids that EFG has popularized. We ordered some Calanthe 'Kojima Violet' and have them started in a pot to see how they grow. Ultimately, we hope to find a spot in the yard for them. From Plant Delights: *Calanthe sieboldii* (syn: *Calanthe striata*), a hard-to-find Japanese native terrestrial orchid, has been a superb performer and one of our favorite calanthes. The evergreen foliage



*Calanthe sieboldii*  
photo credit Juniper Level Botanical Garden



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*(except below 10 degrees F) composes a vigorous 6" tall x 15" wide clump of deeply pleated leaves. In spring, the bloom stalks rise from the ground to reach 20". Along the scape are dozens of small pansy-like flowers of bright yellow...quite stunning. Calanthe sieboldii prefers well-drained, slightly moist, woodland conditions and are proven to be quite easy to grow. After severe winters, they may be very late to emerge.*

Cold hardy terrestrial orchids can be added to your landscape so you'll have naturalized orchids in the yard. They often prefer moist, organic soils that are shaded from the midday sun. There are many to choose from, but only select varieties rated for at least Zone 9b. They may be shipped to you bareroot during their dormant period, so you will have to make sure you understand their life cycle so they can get off to a good start.