

Dendrobium lindleyi/aggregatum – ‘An Annual Favourite’ **by Jeff Glover**

Perhaps one of the most endearing and beautiful Spring ‘visitors’ in northern Australian orchid growers’ collections is *Den. lindleyi*. It is known by many older growers by its synonym, *Dendrobium aggregatum*. In my case it was one of the first orchids I ever saw that was not a cattleya. For a lot of growers when they first get interested in orchids, they arrive to the hobby with pre-conceived ideas of what constitutes an orchid. It would be fair to say for non-orchid growers in the southern temperate states an orchid is a Cymbidium, while in the sub-tropics and tropics it’s a Cattleya. However, in this present age with the proliferation of the ubiquitous Phalaenopsis hybrids, for today’s generation a ‘Phallie’ would now most likely fill the vision of what comprises an orchid. As such, a lot of people starting to become interested in orchids often arrive at shows with these notions; many declaring statements like ‘they have the ‘pink one and now they want the purple one’. Once they see the range and varieties of orchids able to be collected, invariably another person is hooked.



Den lindleyi

And so, it was for me with *Den. lindleyi*, in 1982 when not a yet member of an orchid society and very much a novice; my wife and I took a road trip to Cairns and it was at the late Mick Kieth’s nursery in Townsville that I first saw a huge *Den. aggregatum* as it was called then. It was in full bloom suspended under a mango tree. Along with other ‘Indian Type’ Dendrobiums such as *Thyrisflorum*, *Farmeri* and *Densiflorum*, that he also had in bloom, it was a site I have never forgotten to this day; like a golden orb indelibly seared in to my ‘memory’s hard drive’, and I too was hooked!

Many Indian Dendrobiums along with plants of *Den lindleyi* are seen gracing the show-benches in Queensland at this time of year and our recent Rockhampton Society’s Spring Show was no exception. Unfortunately, like all dendrobiums of this group; it has a relatively short flowering period usually around 2-3 weeks from when the first flowers open to the last. As previously mentioned; its masses of rich yellow-gold flowers make a beautiful display heralding the arrival of Spring for many orchid enthusiasts. A lot of these plants are grown outside in a sheltered position in dappled light such as, under a suitable tree. They will readily grow into huge specimens, so large in fact that moving them to exhibit in a show is near impossible, unless the exhibition hall has tractor access.

Once reaching specimen size it has a propensity to grow its own 'basket,' with many growing points forming a dense mass. They then virtually look after themselves, needing only watering and fertilizing through Spring and Summer. After flowering, new plants can be started by simply removing a clump making sure the forward pseudobulbs are developing or have already developed roots. It has fine roots, so a mix of small-medium bark and charcoal will get the plant started until it grows to a point in a few year's time where re-potting is not necessary or it can be transferred to a basket to act as a mounting structure – and added bonus for the time poor orchid grower.



A mature specimen of *Den. lindleyi* (pic supplied by T Dean)



It is widespread across Asia, especially in Thailand and Burma, from Bhutan in the Western Himalayan foothills to SW China. (orchidspecies.com) It has been widely collected and sent to all points of the globe. It appears to be first described by western botanists in 1839 when found in Thailand. Many have been awarded, the majority being cultural awards. There are two recognized varieties which are *Den. lindleyi* var *majus* and *Den. lindleyi* var *jenkinsi*, the former having larger flowers and the latter smaller flowers and a smaller growth habit. However, similar to a lot of species, there is debate over 'jenkinsi' as to whether it is a variety, sub-species or separate species in its own right, and a literature review will see all three possibilities listed.

Den. jenkinsi or *lindleyi* var *jenkinsi* ?

Den. lindleyi, similar to most Indian Dendrobiums, likes a rest over Winter, so cut back on water and fertilizer. Pests are some of the usual suspects encountered with most orchids, such as scale, thrips and aphids. However, it along with other exotic dendrobiums such as, *Den. nobile*, which is considered the 'foundation species of modern softcane dendrobium orchids; seems immune to the ravages of the voracious and ever present native Dendrobium beetle. The beetles will nibble at the leaves and flowers and that's as far as it goes, no eggs are laid, so no highly destructive larvae follow. Just like with soft-canes they don't seem to like the taste; if only this was the case with hard-cane Dendrobiums. In my experience it is rarely bothered by fungal problems, with many growing outside with excellent air movement and being in its own basket means they are free from the issues associated with rotting potting mixes. Overall, easy to grow and a must for your collection or garden, or even just to impress visitors and neighbours!

References: J. Pfahl., orchidspecies.com , (accessed 26/10/2018)