

Cypripedium orchid culture

- the Lady's Slipper Orchid

This species is distributed across the northern hemisphere including Europe, Asia and North and Central America. It is also called the moccasin flower, Venus' shoes and camel's foot. There are about 58 species which include the Californian lady's slipper (*C. californicum*), the Mexican Pelican Orchid (*C. irapeanum*), the Moccasin flower (*C. acaule*), *Cypripedium parviflorum* from Minnesota (see photo below) and the yellow lady's slipper (*C. calceolus*). The Chinese Cypripediums are found at altitudes of 2000-4000m. For a full list consult The Wikipedia web site listed below (1).



It is a terrestrial deciduous orchid with a rhizome with a bud at the end with the stem growing from the tip. They die back over winter and shoot again in spring.

They are suited to cool temperate to cold environments and will not grow in warm sub tropical environments or areas with hot summers. They are therefore not suited to inland areas of Australia such as the Riverina.

They can have one or up to 12 flowers on the inflorescence depending on the species. Some Cypripediums such as *C. reginae* can grow up to 1 m tall but others are about 45 cm tall.

A detailed description of the growing requirements and culture of the American species *C. reginae* is given in the web article by Botany Boy Plant Encyclopedia entitled "*Cypripedium reginae*, the showy slipper" (5).

Paphiopedilum slipper orchids were at one time grouped with Cypripediums but they are no longer considered part of this group.

Temperature requirements

They are regarded as very cold hardy cool growing orchids. Hybrids are capable of tolerating temperatures below freezing but they do not like hot summer temperatures (2). They prefer a cool shaded area suited to growing ferns. They should be grown in the coolest part of the shade-house (3). Their cool temperature requirements suggest they are more suited to elevated highland and mountainous regions of Australia rather than the Riverina. To grow them well you would need to be able to limit daily maximum temperatures to less than 26°C and so need a temperature controlled glasshouse in the Riverina. The Chinese Cypripediums are reported to need a temperature range of 0-20°C (4) and are said to be unavailable in Australia although this may have changed.



Light

They will not take strong direct sunlight and should be grown in light shade equivalent to about 70% shade cloth for protection.

Humidity and air movement

They prefer moderate levels of humidity.

Water

Plants should be kept uniformly moist but not over wet and not allowed to dry out. They should not be allowed to get over wet during winter and should be allowed to become almost dry when they are dormant.



Potting medium

They can be grown in large pots and require repotting about every 4 to 5 years (2). They prefer a well-aerated and free draining humus rich soil that does not readily dry out. Adding perlite to improve drainage and aeration is recommended.

When repotting place the bud just at the surface of the potting mix but do not bury it. It can be covered with a light dressing of sand or fine gravel to protect it from pests.

Fertilizers

Plants should be fed as soon as growth starts in spring with applications at about 10 day intervals. A weak half strength solution of balanced fertilizer can be applied alternating with seaweed fertilizer (2).

Cypripediums for the Riverina region of NSW

Hybrid varieties are considered the easiest to grow as they exhibit hybrid vigour. Many of the natural occurring species are considered very difficult to grow successfully and hybrids are strongly recommended. Temperatures are likely to be too hot for this species in the Riverina and there are no known growers of these orchids in the Riverina.

They are not readily available in Australia although a nursery at Leura in NSW does advertise them.

Acknowledgements and further reading

The information in this guide has been obtained from the references listed below.

1. Wikipedia. Cypripedium. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cypripedium>
2. Laneside Hardy Orchid Nursery.
<http://lanesidehardyorchids.com/catalog/cypripedium.php>
3. lidaforsgarden. Cypripedium propagation and growing
http://lidaforsgarden.com/Orchids/cypripedium_eng.htm
4. The Orchids of China by B Milligan.
<http://www.oscov.asn.au/articles3/orcchina.htm>
5. Botany Boy Plant Encyclopedia. *Cypripedium reginae*, the showy slipper.
<http://botanyboy.org/cypripedium-reginae-the-showy-ladys-slipper/>
6. Gardening Australia Flora's Orchids. ABC Books (2005).

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These notes are intended as a guide only and are composed from available information and local experience. The Wagga Wagga Orchid Society and its members are not responsible for any loss or damage.