

Ansellia africana Orchid Growing in the Riverina region of NSW

-*African ansellia* or *Leopard orchid*

Ansellia africana is an epiphyte found in tropical Africa in Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and northern parts of South Africa (1). *A. africana* is the only known species in this genus (2) with *A. gigantea* and *A. nilotica* being synonyms (5). In addition to the normal roots they can also have white needle like roots that point upwards to form a 'basket' to catch rotting leaves upon which the plant feeds. These roots are only produced when the plant is not receiving sufficient N fertilizer (2).

It has cane like pseudobulbs up to 100cm long with 6 or 7 narrow leaves (2). The plants flower during or after the dry winter months with racemes having from 10 to 100 yellow green 6 cm wide flowers that can have brown spots (1,2). The flowers are sweetly scented and attract moths for pollination. Flowers are short lived lasting about 10 days (2). In the wild the plants are very long lived and can grow into very large plants weighing over a tonne. Seed pods take 12-15 months to mature (5).

They are successfully grown in an unheated shade house in Adelaide and so should also be suited for growing in a shade house the Riverina region of inland NSW. They should be treated similar to Dendrobiums in terms of light and watering (3). Yellow flowering forms are considered the most cold tolerant (5).

Ansellia is closely related to Cymbidiums and has been crossed with 9 other genera to form 9 intergeneric hybrids (2). *Ansellia* x *Cymbidium* hybrids are called *Ansidiums*.

Temperature requirements

The optimum temperature is 10 to 25°C (3) but they will tolerate temperature extremes from 1°C to 40°C for short periods (5). In Adelaide they tolerate temperatures of 3 to 35°C. They will tolerate lower night temperatures in winter if daytime temperatures are higher and plants are kept dry. They are said to tolerate light frosts (4) but they are best protected from frost.

Light

They prefer strong light around 2000fc to flower (2) and the leaves should be pale yellow or light green. Plants with darker leaves may not be receiving sufficient light to flower (2). In the Riverina region 50-70% shade cloth should be adequate with plenty of light in winter to encourage flowering (3).

Humidity and air movement

They prefer a humid environment with at least 50% humidity in winter and 70% in summer (3). Use water-filled gravel trays or misting to increase humidity in hot weather (3). Good air movement is important when humidity is high to minimise fungal and bacterial diseases.



Ansellia africana



Water

They need a dry rest in autumn-winter of about 6 weeks and can go several months without water (2). In the Riverina region they would require an opaque polycarbonate roof to prevent them receiving excess rain over the cooler months.

They should be allowed to dry between waterings but do not let pseudobulbs shrivel which indicates they need more water (3). A dry winter spell is essential for flowering.



Potting medium

Potting medium varies with your watering regime and plant size. A free draining Cattleya like coarse potting medium comprising a mixture of bark and perlite is suitable (4) but it can also contain vermiculite and sphagnum moss (3). Repot every second or third year just after flowering has finished and new growth becomes visible (3). They do not like to be disturbed so only repot when necessary (4).

They can be grown in pots, on slabs or in hanging baskets.

Fertilizers

They require frequent application of quarter to half strength fertilizer during their growing season. A high phosphorus and potassium fertilizer is recommended in early spring or once flower spikes appear. Leach pots periodically to remove excess salts. Plants will not develop their 'trash basket' of vertical roots if they are receiving sufficient N (3).

Diseases

They behave similarly to Oncidiums. Ensure leaves are dry by evening and maintain good air movement to reduce the risk of bacterial and fungal diseases.

Intergeneric hybrids

They are closely related to *Cymbidiums* and cross most readily with *Cymbidiums* and genera from Asia, Africa, and South America (5). The following crosses have been registered;

- Ansidium* (*Ansellia* x *Cymbidium*)
- Anaphorchis* (*Graphorkis* x *Ansellia*)
- Catasellia* (*Catasetum* x *Ansellia*)
- Cycsellia* (*Cycnoches* x *Ansellia*)
- Cyrtellia* (*Cyrtopodium* x *Ansellia*)
- Eulosellia* (*Eulophia* x *Ansellia*)
- Galeansellia* (*Galeandra* x *Ansellia*)
- Mormosellia* (*Mormodes* x *Ansellia*)
- Promellia* (*Promenaea* x *Ansellia*)



*Your comments and suggestions on cultural guide are welcome.
Email your comments to dearconsultingservices@gmail.com*

Further reading and acknowledgements

The information in this guide has been gained from local growers and the publications below.

1. Ansellia africana. <http://www.plantzafrica.com/plantab/ansellafric.htm>
2. Ansellia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ansellia>
3. Growing Ansellia africana orchids. <http://www.landscape-and-garden.com/Orchids/AnselliaAfricana>
4. Gardening Australia Flora's Orchids. ABC Books (2005).
5. *Ansellia africana*: Africa's "speciosum" by M. Shergold (2010). Australian Orchid Review Vol. 7(2).

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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.