

Neofinetia falcata orchid culture (syn *Vanda falcata*) in the Riverina region of NSW

also known as the Japanese orchid or Samurai orchid-

This cool tolerant species (pronounced nee-oh-fi-NETT-ee-ah), belongs to the Vandae group and originates in Japan, China and Korea (2). It is one of the oldest known orchids in cultivation (4) and was once cultivated by the Shoguns in Japan and considered a sacred plant in that country. Plants are small, growing to a height of about 12cm and produce small fragrant white, cream or pink flowers in December in the Riverina environment. They are an epiphyte growing on deciduous trees in their natural environment (2).



The Neofinetia genus is thought to have 3 species, *N. falcata*, *N. richardsiana* and *N. xichangensis*, the later two are poorly known and not well described (6).

Recently *Neofinetia* has been merged into the *Vanda* genus and reclassified as *Vanda falcata* (4) although this classification is not widely accepted (6).

A yellow flowered mericlone form of *V. falcata* is now available in the USA and has a citrus fragrance. There is also a rare variegated leaf form, which is highly prized (1).

They have no pseudobulbs but they have a short stem (3).

Many hybrids have been produced to convey increased cold tolerance (3) and a greater range of flower colours. Recently a new range of flower colours have appeared with creams, pinks, purples, yellows, oranges and greens (6). The genetics of these new colours is unclear and some believe they may be hybrids. Neofinetia hybrids are scarce in Australia and most are hybrids with *Ascocentrum ampullaceum* producing the hybrid *Ascofinetia* (*Neofinetia falcata* x *Ascocentrum ampullaceum*) (6).

Temperature requirements

In its natural environment summer temperatures are typically 26-31°C in day and 18-23°C at night (2). In winter temperatures are typically 12-13°C during the day and 3-4°C at night. Temperatures in their natural environment may reach as high as 36°C and as low as -7°C (3) but these extremes should be avoided. It is successfully grown in an unheated shade house in Melbourne with a fiberglass roof along with native dendrobiums (5). Flowers need to be protected from the heat in summer if they are to last (5).

Light

As they come from deciduous forests they receive high light during winter and early spring (2000-3600 fc) (3) which is important to promote flowering, but lower light in summer (2). Shading should be removed in autumn and winter to simulate its natural environment (3).



Humidity and air movement

Plants are accustomed to very good air movement (2). Humidity is typically about 80-85% during summer falling to 75% for the rest of the year in its natural environment (2). Misting would be advisable in the Riverina environment during hot weather.

Water

They require frequent watering during the growing season but a drier rest in winter (2). They should not be allowed to dry out completely (3). Less water should be given when growing conditions are cool or cold (3) with fortnightly watering being adequate at this time. They may need daily watering in hot weather in summer if grown on a mount or shallow tray type container (5).

Potting medium

These orchids naturally grow on tree trunks at right angles to the branches which is important to drain water away from the base of the leaves which avoids bacterial rot (2,3). They are therefore well suited to mounting on slabs of tree fern (2) but can also be grown in pots providing they have very good drainage. Roots are used to excellent drainage and the potting medium needs to ensure good drainage. Growers have been successful with a coarse mix of bark, cork, stone and charcoal (5). In Japan they are grown on mounds of sphagnum moss wrapped around a rock (2,4) in shallow bonsai type pots. They are very subject to rotting if plants are grown vertically and plants should be at an angle to allow water to drain off the foliage (3).



Neofinetia falcata hybrid

Fertilizers

A balanced low strength fertilizer is suggested when they are actively growing from October to April (5) and pots should be flushed regularly to remove excess salts (3). No fertilizers are required in winter.

Acknowledgements and further reading

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

1. Gardening Australia Flora's Orchids. ABC Books (2005).
2. *Neofinetia falcata*. Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neofinetia_falcata
3. *Neofinetia falcata*. Orchid Species culture. Charles and Margaret Baker.
<http://www.orchidculture.com/COD/FREE/FS344.html>
4. *Neofinetia falcata* and its hybrids.
<http://www.calorchid.com/product-test-neofinetia/>
5. *Neofinetia falcata* by Gary Backhouse.
<http://www.oscov.asn.au/articles2/neofin.htm>
6. *Neofinetia falcata*- and the new colour "forms". David Banks (2017) The Australian Orchid Review Vol. 82; pages 19-24.



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