The ‘Oncidium Alliance’ - Making sense of the new taxonomy

There are now 7 main genera, with many former Odontoglossum species now included in Oncidium, and some former Oncidium species now moved into the new genera Gomesa, Trichocentrum, Rhynchostele, and Tolumnia. So now the ‘Oncidium Alliance’ includes the seven main genera below, together with some other minor genera.

1.

Oncidium (Onc.)

The name refers to the warty callus on the base of the lip. There are 381 species recognised, but many of the species now included in Oncidium used to be Odontoglossum species eg. Onc. alexandrae used to be Odontoglossum crispum.

This is a large and variable group, widespread over almost all of tropical America. Oncidiums as a whole are epiphytes (grow on trees) but there are lithophytic (grow on rocks)occurrances and some can be terrestrial. Culturally as a whole, intermediate, well watered, even conditions year round, with moderate shade will be successful.

2.

Miltonia (Milt.)

There are 21 recognized species ranging through Brazil and into Peru. Despite being easy to grow, Miltonia species tend to be subject to spots on their thin leaves, generally caused by fungi proliferation and normally, when exposed to the amount of light they need to achieve a full bloom, their foliage gets a bit too yellow-colored, although they should never be exposed to full sunlight. Finding the right balance of light exposure to avoid yellow leaves but still produce nice blooming is important and with some precautions the grower will succeed. Despite the fact that they exhibit a rest period after blooming, Miltonias always need to be watered regularly, and more abundantly during active growth and blooming. They need at least 65% relative humidity and good ventilationall the time. Moderate weekly fertiliz-ing with a balanced formula is beneficial during active growth. They can be potted in a free drainingbut moisture retentive medium.

3.

Brassia (Brs.)

There are 67 species spread throughout tropical America at altitudes below 1500 meters. They are commonly called 'The Spider Orchid' because of the flowers unique shape. This genus is extensively pollinate by femalewasps that sting at the column attempt-ing to pull it away to consume it, and in their struggle pick up the pollina on their head. They then move to another flower where the pollina is stripped from their head by the bottom of the column where it enters the stigma. Culturally plants do well mounted on tree fern, in a basket, or potted with a well draining medium, and grown in intermediate conditions.

4.

Gomesa (Gom.)

There are about 125 species in this group, and most of the members of this new genus used to be Oncidiums. Gomesa now contains what used to be the ‘Varicosa’ and ‘Crispum’ types of Oncidium. ‘Varicosa’ types often have bright yellow colours with large showy ‘skirts’, while ‘crispum’ types are often brown and yellow with quite large flowers. Both types usually have branching inflorescences and both types have been used widely in hybridising, so there are now many new intergeneric hybrid names as well (about 75).

5.

Trichocentrum (Trt.)

These used to be known as ‘Mule-Ear Oncidiums’ because of the single large fleshy leaf on each pseudobulb. They need to be grown a little drier than other ‘Oncidium alliance’, and do well mounted or potted in a free draining mix. They often produce a large branching inflorescence. There are about 78species in total. The species commonly grown hereinclude Trt. splendidum and Trt. lanceanum.

6.

Rhynchostele (Rst.)

This is another new genus made up of 19 species, many of which used to be Odontoglossums. The species used most often in hybridising are Rst. Bictoniense, Rst. rossii, and Rst. uroskinneri. Culturally these can be treated the same as Oncidium.

7.

Tolumnia (Tol.)

These small plants useds to be known as ‘Equitant Oncidiums’. The 27 species are endemic to the Caribbean Basin with many confined to a single island. Most are found in intermediate to warm conditions on twigs exposed to bright light and air movement. Humidity is high and heavy dews or rain showers occur daily. Air movement is constant and plants neverremain wet for long. Leaves, which are triangular or circular in cross section, overlap each other at their base to resemble a fan. The inflorescences arise between the leaf base and bear colorful, showy flowers. The labella are large, ornamented by variously shaped calli. The column bears prominent wings flanking the stigma. These do best on a mount so they dry quickly. Pieces of old, weathered, untreated hardwood fence palings work well.

Some commonly grown ‘Oncidium Alliance’ hybrid genera:

Brassidium (Brsdm)= Brassia x Oncidium

Miltonidium (Mtdm.) = Miltonia x Oncidium

Miltassia (Mtssa.) = Miltonia x Brassia

Odontocidium (Odcm.) = Odontoglossum x Oncidium

Colmanara (Colm.) = Miltonia x Oncidium x Odontoglossum

Aliceara (Alcra.) = Brassia x Miltonia x Oncidium

Vuylstekeara (Vuyl.) = Coch-lioda x Miltonia x Odontoglossum

Wilsonara (Wils.) = Cochlioda x Odontoglossum x Oncidium

Oncostele (Ons.) = Rhynchostele x Oncidium

All are beautiful and interesting, despite the names!